

THE STORY AS AN EDUCATIONAL FORM FOR THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The average layperson knows very little about the Bible. Biblical illiteracy is rampant among the churches, and even those who claim to know the Bible well often fail to see it in a broad perspective as the story of a people who feel that God has touched their lives. The purpose of this professional project is to explore the role that the story form has had for the Bible and can have for the local parish as pastors seek to help people understand the meaning of the Bible for their lives.

Chapter One, "The Story in Biblical Tradition," looks at the place of story in the Bible. The Old Testament is primarily one overall story, including many smaller stories that fit somewhere in the larger one. Stories are told not for the purpose of presenting historical facts--though they often do that--but in order to give people a past and a tradition. This is why the Old Testament was written. In the New Testament, the story form is the one chosen by the gospel writers because it served to give the people in the church a past that made sense out of their present, and it provided for an open future.

Chapter Two, "The Function of Storytelling in Human Experience," explores the importance of story in our lives. Life is like a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. When we tell about our lives, we tell a story. Story provides the order and meaning for life that we need, and, as myth or sacred story, becomes the foundation of our culture. As parable, however, story can also undermine our culture. Story emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual, since we all have a story

to tell.

Chapter Three, "Storytelling As A Way of Speaking About God," suggests that--for many people--talking about God in a story is more effective than in the terms of systematic theology. The Old Testament was composed of the stories about God that enabled the people to survive the exile. The gospel writers wrote their books in the same pattern in which God had come to them, in a narrative way. Faith is more than assent to doctrines, and story can help people be confronted by God in dynamic, concrete, and interesting ways that can encourage faith. The experience of conversion can be understood as finding a new story to tell about life.

Chapter Four, "Educational Implications," in the first section, looks at the role of story in Christian education. People come to faith not through classroom learning but by participation in a community of faith. And it is story that provides the identity for these communities. Section two suggests ways of using story in the life of the church. In Bible study, lay people must begin to see an overall view of the Bible. What did the story mean to the people who told it, and what does it mean to us? Telling our own story can help us know who we are. When we compare our story with The Story, our story may be confirmed and strengthened, or it may be challenged and shattered. Children need to have opportunities to reenact the stories of the Bible, but these stories should not be used for applying moralistic lessons. Finally, story can help preaching by encouraging more creativity and a sense of movement in the sermon where the preacher and people go on a journey together.

The Appendices give some specific examples of relational Bible studies and simulations, including The Bible Story Game, which enables children to learn the order of thirty-six key events of the biblical story in a fun and painless way.

PREFACE

Once upon a time there was a church whose people were confused about the Bible.

"I can't pronounce that word, Miss Jones," said Johnny.

"That's not the way," Cheryl stated, "that I learned it in biology."

"Do you think Paul really had such a low opinion of women?" asked Joyce.

"What in the hell does that damn passage mean, anyway?" snorted Joe.

"How can I help the people in this church find in the Bible a foundation for their lives?" wondered the pastor.

So the pastor began to read some books and talk with people who knew about the Bible. Lots of words had been written, but no one author had the answer. Many agreed that it is difficult to hear a message for today from an ancient document. And because "today" is always changing, any message from God may be different in each "today." The people with knowledge seemed to agree about the task at hand: to understand the Bible in such a way that God is heard in our present situation.

One idea fascinated the pastor: some people liked to speak of the Bible as story. A story has a beginning and a middle and an end, and as people get involved in a story, they often discover order and meaning for their lives. Maybe, just maybe, if church people could see the Bible as a story, they would find that it helps them understand their own stories. Perhaps the story of the human race as seen in the

Bible could lead the people to a deeper understanding of their stories as individuals.

The pastor pondered and read and scribbled notes. He threw away lots of pieces of paper and typed up a quotation or two from here and there and returned books to the library. Finally he had an idea that fit together.

The pastor decided to develop lots of ways for people in the church to learn the story of the Bible. He made up a game, he used booklets that he had read, he drew up a whole series of Children's Sermons, and he figured out other ways for people to hear the story anew.

He also wanted people to tell their story. He borrowed outlines from authors and teachers, and set up workshops for the people in the church. These times together would not be just fun (though they should be that), they would help the people see how the story and their stories were related.

Finally the big day came. The pastor was ready to try out some of his ideas with the church people. How would they respond? Would they learn about the Bible? Would the message of God that many had found in the Bible be real for them in a new way? Would they appreciate what he had done and be helped by it?

Ending Number One

"That's a neat story about Joseph," said Johnny. "I can see myself in several of the characters."

"I never realized," observed Cheryl, "that the Bible speaks to

real life."

"Paul's understanding of freedom has a lot to say about liberation," noted Joyce.

"I tried to follow the model of servanthood on my work team," said Joe, "and while it was very new for me, I can see that I may become more useful to the project."

"I have found a new fulfillment in my ministry," said the pastor. "I'm not quite as anxious for vacation as usual."

Ending Number Two

"I enjoyed that story, Miss Jones. I wish I had a new coat," remarked Johnny.

"I don't mind going to Church as much as I used to," said Cheryl.

"I'm not sure I would want to have lived in Paul's time," observed Joyce.

"Sure, I'll help out on the Work Day," responded Joe. "The damn church needs cleaning up."

"It's back to the drawing board," commented the pastor. "I'll go at it again next fall."

INTRODUCTION

Daughter: "Daddy, tell me a bed-time story."

Father: "It's late, honey and it's time to turn out the light."

Daughter: "Please, just a short one."

Father: "Well, O.K. 'Once upon a time a king and queen lived in a big castle. They had a baby girl, and she grew up to be a beautiful princess. She had everything she wanted, but she was lonely. One day she met a handsome prince from the next kingdom. They were married and lived happily ever after.' Good-night."

Daughter: "Good-night, Daddy."

The narrative form--or story--has received much attention in recent years. Since much of the Bible was written as story, it has been suggested that we could teach about God more effectively by using the narrative form. The purpose of this professional project is to show how we in the church--by understanding and using story--can do a better job of leading people to faith.

A major problem in the church today is what might be called Biblical illiteracy. Some time back James Smart pointed out that there is a "strange silence of the Bible in the church,"¹ and many local pastors can verify this. Few people know much about the Bible, and those who seem to know the most often understand it the least. The task is not simply to teach about the Bible, but to lead them to a faith in God through a confrontation with the Bible.

This project is being written with the hope that it will be useful to the parish minister as he/she seeks to lead people to faith. It does not provide programs adaptable to every situation, but perhaps

¹James D. Smart, The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

it can stimulate the pastor to see the importance of using story creatively in the local church.

The word "story" in this professional project will be used to name a particular literary genre, which is also called "narrative form." A story presents a sequence of events and tells something about their relationship. Story can be defined as a narrative account that "binds events and agents together in an intelligible pattern."² The words "The Story" refer to the story of the Bible as a whole, while "my story" or "our story" refers to the way individuals or groups choose to tell the story of who they are.

Two additional points need to be made here about story:

1) A story is a work of art, not a historical document. This is true of any reporting of events, no matter how carefully the reporter seeks to follow what happened. Every reporter or author must decide which facts to present and which to leave out. He or she must also decide what is the best way to present them. As these decisions are made, a reporter becomes a story teller. And story telling involves compromises:

The impulse to shape, to improve, to present not what was said or what did happen but what should have been said or ought to have happened, inevitably makes itself felt. Narrative art is the art of story telling, and the more literate and sensitive a man is, the more he feels creative pressures which drive him to seek beauty or truth at the expense of fact. Narrative art is an art of compromise, in which gains are always purchased at the expense of sacrifices. The story teller is often faced with the choice of being either a bore or a charlatan. The great story tellers inevitably choose the latter in preference to the former.³

²Stanley Hauerwas, "Story and Theology," Religion in Life, (Autumn 1976), 344.

³Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 258.

The purpose of the author, the way the story is used, the situation of the reader, what he learns from the story and other factors may have much more to say about the value of a story than simply whether or not it follows history.

2) Therefore, it is important to note that the use of the word "story" does not make a value judgment in regard to the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of the events of the story. Some stories are totally fictional; they make no attempt to follow historical facts. Other stories seek to be very faithful to historical facts. The Bible has both kinds of stories and many that range somewhere inbetween. The value of a story may or may not rest upon how closely it follows history.

This professional project begins with a look at the story in the Biblical tradition (Chapter One). Much of the Old Testament is written in story form, and existed as story in the oral tradition before being written down. The relationship between the Old Testament stories and history is examined, which continues the discussion of the previous two paragraphs in the introduction. When we come to the New Testament we find in the gospels a very unique use of story (which some authors have suggested are early ancestors of the modern novel). If you take the story out of the Bible, you have taken away the core.

Chapter Two, "The Function of Storytelling in Human Experience," discusses the way story is helpful to human beings as we seek to make sense out of life. People do not read (or listen to) stories simply because they are enjoyable; stories help provide meaning and order for life. They give us a past and point us to the future. Being able to tell the story of one's own life can bring a sense of wholeness and

meaning that human life needs. This chapter helps identify the importance of storytelling.

Chapter Three, "Storytelling As A Way of Speaking About God," suggests that--following the lead of the Bible--we would do well today to speak about God with stories. Storytelling, since it is rooted in our Biblical Faith and is so important for people in finding meaning in life, may be the best way to talk about God and to share faith in Him.

Chapter Four, "Educational Implications," takes a look at the task of Christian Education and then suggests ways that story might be helpful to the local church as it seeks to lead people to faith. Specifically, comments are made about the importance of learning how to tell our own story, relating our story to The Story, using story with children and in preaching.

The Appendix provides several detailed examples of how story can be used in the local church.

Chapter 1

THE STORY IN BIBLICAL TRADITION

Parishioner: "Preacher, that was the finest sermon you have ever preached. You really stuck to the Bible."

Minister: "Thank you." (With a smile on his face accompanied by a deflated feeling. "All I did," he thought to himself, "was tell the story of David. What about all those sermons on which I worked so hard to be creative?")

The Bible is one of the finest collection of stories ever put together. From the story of the creation of the world in Genesis to the story by John on the Island of Patmos, episodes from the Bible have captured the imagination and attention of religious people and secular literary enthusiasts alike. Sunday School teachers and world leaders have been quoting stories from the Bible to make their points for a long time. If the story element of the Bible were to be removed, there would be very little left, and that reminder would be "without form and void," as was the universe before God began His work. Story is an essential element of the Bible.

The Old Testament As Story

Much of the Old Testament is presented in story form. The Creation Story begins in a way that is quite similar to traditional stories today. "In the beginning . . ." might easily be phrased "Once upon a time" Adam and Eve are the characters of this first story of the Bible, and their sons are part of the next. Shortly after that is the story of Noah and the Flood, which leads to another story about the Tower of Babel. A new series of stories begins with Abraham,

and these include stories about his descendents, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, et al. In the second book of the Old Testament we find the story of Moses, which is the foundation for many stories to follow: Joshua, the Judges, the first king Saul, the great king David, his son Solomon. Finally we move along an extended story through the Fall of Samaria and the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Exile and the Return. The people of Israel, the story tells us, have returned to their home, Jerusalem.

We have, then, in the Old Testament, many stories that comprise one overall story of the people of Israel. The story opens "in the beginning" and continues step by step in a cumulative fashion to tell what happened to the people of Israel from their earliest contact with God down to their return to their homeland and the establishment of Judaism after the Exile. And there the story comes to an end, at least as far as the Jewish people were concerned.

The story that is central to so much of the Old Testament, gradually became a completed story. There were some ragged ends, it is true, but basically it rounded itself off, with one great stage describing the process down to the death of Moses--and this stage stated in story form the establishment of the Jewish polity of postexilic times--and another describing it from Moses down to the end of the kingdom and return from exile.¹

Almost all of the Old Testament books may be fit into this story at some place or another. The Book of Job is hard to place in any particular place, but it stands as a story by itself (and perhaps is one of the "ragged ends" to which Barr refers). The Old Testament is a series of stories within one over-arching story.

¹James Barr, "Story and History in Biblical Theology," Journal of Religion, LVI (January 1976), 15.

Story and History

Little Old Lady: "Reverend, are you telling me that the Bible is just a story?"

Minister: "No, the Bible is not just a story. But, yes, it is a story. It is and it isn't."

Little Old Lady: "You preachers sure make the Bible hard to understand. I thought you were supposed to explain it to us."

One valid question to ask about any literary work is: "Why was it written?" Once that issue is clarified it is easier to decide whether or not the author has been successful in bringing about the desired results. With the Old Testament, the question becomes very complex, because there is not a single author. Many stories that existed for generations in the oral tradition have been compiled at various times by numerous editors. It is impossible to ask one person: "Why did you write this?"

Yet an answer to the question can be surmised. The purpose of the Old Testament is to tell the story of a people. Though different parts of the Old Testament became part of the oral tradition at different times, and were put into written form over a period of time, all of the sections were told and written for the purpose of filling in one part of the story of the Hebrew-Jewish people. "These are our roots." "These stories tell how we came to be." "This is the way our ancestors responded, and we are called to do the same (or differently)." The Old Testament is a compilation of stories of how the people of Israel came to understand themselves as God's people. And it developed in a way not un-like that of other narrative literature, where the most important aspect is

the fact of tradition itself. The epic story-teller is telling a traditional story. The primary impulse which moves him is not a

historical one, nor a creative one; it is re-creative. He is re-telling a traditional story, and therefore his primary allegiance is not to fact, not to truth, not to entertainment, but to the mythos itself--the story as preserved in the tradition which the epic story-teller is re-creating. The word mythos meant precisely this in ancient Greece: a traditional story.²

The aim of the Old Testament authors and editors was not, therefore, to write a factual history of ancient Palestine and its people. They did, in many cases, write about historical facts, but recording them was not their purpose. They were seeking to re-tell the story of a people. Some of what they wrote is a good source for ancient history, some is not. There is, for example, a vast difference between the historical accuracy of the Creation Story and the stories of David. The Old Testament was not written as a history book.

The long narrative corpus of the Old Testament seems to me, as a body of literature, to merit the title of story rather than that of history. Or, to put it in another way, it seems to merit entirely the title of story but only in part the title history; or, again, we may adopt the term used by Hans Frei and say the narrative is "history-like."³

So, the Old Testament is not "just a story," it is a very important story with definite historical features. The purpose for its writing was not to present historical facts, but to retell the story of the Hebrew-Jewish people in such a way that the tradition would remain alive for each new generation.⁴

²Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 11-12.

³Barr, p. 5, quoting Hans Frei, The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 10.

⁴The Jewish people still tell the story of the exodus from Egypt at each Passover feast. The Passover Haggadah is the manual which includes that story as it is told annually. It begins when the

Story in the New Testament

In the New Testament, as in the Old, story is very present. The story form is the foundation of the gospel, which is a creation of the New Testament writers. It is, as Sallie TeSelle has pointed out, "the only original literary genre in the New Testament."⁵ The gospel contains many mini-stories about Jesus--anecdotes, miracles, healings, teachings, parables--and they combine to form one large story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Mark wrote his gospel--assumed to be the earliest--over one third of a century after the life and death of Jesus. He was a member of the Church who was concerned with the faith of Christians, and he was very much a part of the struggle to encourage his fellow Christians in those difficult times. Mark might have chosen to write letters to his Christian brothers and sisters, as Paul had done. Perhaps Mark considered presenting a lecture series (!) on steadfastness amidst suffering. He could have written a full-fledged apocalypse. Instead, Mark chose to write a gospel, which followed the narrative or story form. He used a great deal of traditional material that was familiar to the people in the Church, but Mark was the first to put it together

young child asks the question: "Why does this night differ from all other nights?" and the others reply by reciting the story of the exodus from slavery in Egypt. The story of that event remains the central part of the great celebration of Passover. See The Passover Haggadah (New York: Schocken, 1953).

⁵Sallie TeSelle, Speaking in Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 36. See also Norman Perrin, The New Testament: An Introduction (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 143.

as a connected narrative. His work was both creative (in the structure) and re-creative (in the materials he used).⁶

It is doubtful that Mark was enough of a literary genius to see that he had made a step forward in narrative literature.⁷ But the proof of the quality of his writing lies in the fact that his form was copied--by Matthew, Luke, and John, among others--and that his work has survived to the present. By telling the story of Jesus he helped give the people in the church a past. They were able to identify with Jesus in his suffering, and that helped them in their present.

By bringing the remembered past into the present, the story enables the participant to take part in the story, to be present at the saving act. This bringing of the ultimate, founding reality into the present, so that the believer may take part in its story, is the religious background for the 'catharsis' which Aristotle and the many critics who have followed him have seen as the result of participating in any story.⁸

Likewise, Mark gave his readers a future. The story of Jesus never really ended. The conclusion of the gospel with the story of the empty tomb told them that Christ was still alive and would be with them in their future.

The movement toward the future is most clearly revealed in the way these books come to an end--the 'end' of the book does not simply bring the 'plot' to a conclusion which resolves the action, though there is a sense in which this takes place. More profoundly,

⁶Perrin, p. 145. As many scholars have noted, the main source for Mark's gospel was the passion narrative.

⁷Wilder notes that "none of our four evangelists writes as a self-conscious literary craftsman. Not one of them names himself." Amos N. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 30.

⁸William Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 16-17.

however, the ending--the story of resurrection conveyed through the disciples' discovery of the empty tomb--shows that the story does not end with the ending of the book; rather the Gospel narrative is a story of how something began that is still in process and moving toward its future and conclusion.⁹

The gospel follows the traditional narrative form that, as Beardslee summarizes, "mediates between the 'reenactment of the past' function of the story . . . and the function of moving the participant, so to speak, into an open future."¹⁰

Mark, then, chose a new literary form, not because he was concerned about literature, but because he hoped it would meet the need of his people and provide them comfort and strength in the midst of their struggles. And in doing this, Mark kept the story of Jesus alive for the world to come, and also made a step forward in the world of literature.¹¹

So, the story is very important to the New Testament. It is, in fact, the core around which the rest of the New Testament grew. The gospels were written later than Paul's letters, but from early times the gospels were placed first in the canon and considered to be the foundation of the New Testament. The story of Jesus was the crux of the matter. The other books illuminated this story.

The question about the historical value of the New Testament is similar to that of the Old Testament. The purpose of writing the gospels was not to write a historically accurate account of the life of

⁹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 18.

¹¹Auerbach discusses the method of the gospel writers and their contribution to the development of the narrative. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 40ff.

Jesus: it was to retell the story of what God had done through Jesus Christ in such a way as to bring faith to the people living in Mark's time. Yet this is not to say that it is irrelevant whether Jesus did in fact exist and act in a way very much like the way he is portrayed in the gospel accounts.

The demand that what Jesus was not be different from what we have come to know of him in the Gospels is not an external demand of historical truth, but rather the very nature of the story of Jesus itself demands that Jesus be who the church said and continues to say he is.¹²

Finally, the story of the New Testament became part of the story of the whole Bible. Judaism may have considered that the story of their Holy Scriptures was completed, but the early Christians saw themselves as part of that story.¹³ And Christians down through the centuries have seen the Bible as one great story: the people of Israel

¹²Stanley Hauerwas, "Story and Theology," Religion in Life, XLV (Autumn 1976), 340. Norman Perrin, in a discussion on myth and history, says that it is not important if some of the historical details are distorted by the myth, but if the historical fact that "embodies" the myth would prove to be non-historical, the myth would be destroyed and valueless. This is consistent with Hauerwas' statement above. See Perrin, pp. 29-31

¹³Sanders has pointed out that the Torah of the Jewish people is essentially story, and only secondarily law. "The basic structure of the Pentateuch is not that of a law code but rather that of a narrative. The Torah is essentially a story of the origins of ancient Israel. It is part of a longer story which extends through the rise and fall of Israel's social and political existence as an ancient Near Eastern nation, and into the bare beginnings of its post-exilic reconstitution known as Judaism." James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p. 4. The people in the early church (e.g., Paul) understood the Torah as primarily story, and they believed that God had acted again in the Christ-event. James A. Sanders, "Torah and Christ," Interpretation, XXIX (October 1975), 390, writes about the Torah-Christ story as a way of saying that the Bible is one great story of how the people of God understood He had revealed Himself to them.

telling the stories of how they understood God to have called them, the people of Judaism telling how they were God's people, the Christians telling how they saw themselves as the fulfillment of all the promises God had made to His people.

Chapter 2

THE FUNCTION OF STORYTELLING IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Laywoman: "Reverend, I just want to thank you for that fine sermon. It really spoke to me."

Minister: "Thank you" (glowing inside).

Laywoman: "People say you preach too long, but not this morning. It seemed short."

Minister: (A little less glowing) "It was about the usual length today." (Thinking: "A good story in the sermon will make them forget the time any Sunday.")

Any preacher knows that when he/she begins a story in a sermon, the attention of the congregation increases immediately. The wiggling ceases, some of the people lean forward, everyone wants to hear a story. And preachers enjoy good stories themselves. They are always looking for them. A story has a power all its own to capture people's attention and to get a message across. Nothing can take the place of a good story.

The reason stories have power is not just because they are entertaining and enjoyable, though they are that. A story tells us about life and the way we live it. Among others, Stephen Crites has described "that narrative quality of experience."¹ Life is basically like a story, and the best way to understand and talk about our lives is with stories.

A story, for example, has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and so do our lives. One way of visualizing a story is to picture a freight train: the engine represents the beginning, the box cars and

¹Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of American Academy of Religion, XXXIX (September 1971), 29.

flat cars and tanker cars, etc., represent different episodes in the middle of the story, while the caboose is the end. Our lives can be pictured in a similar way: there is the beginning, followed by many and sundry episodes leading to the yet unknown conclusion.² The structure of story and structure of life are similar, and this is one reason stories are important to us.

There are more profound ways of saying this. Charles Rice says "we live by story. . . . At the very least our sense of identity depends upon our being able to tell--to others and to ourselves--some kind of coherent story into which we fit."³ Sam Keen quotes Laurens Van De Post who writes: "Without a story of your own to live you haven't got a life of your own."⁴ In other words, the ability to tell a story about our life is not just something fun to do, it is essential. This is the way we know who we are.

How does one answer the question when someone asks, "Who are you?" Assuming there is a desire to respond, the normal way is to begin to tell a story. "I am So and So, and I live at a certain place now and work at this location, but I came from there a few years ago." The story will be brief or more detailed, depending on how much the person wants to reveal about his/her life. Telling our story, as Rice

²We know our life will end in death, but we do not know the where or when.

³Charles Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXXI (Spring 1976), 187.

⁴Sam Keen, To a Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970, p. 87, quoting Laurens Van Der Post in Patterns of Renewal, p. 9.

suggests, provides us with our identity. "This is who I am."

The Need for Order and Meaning for Life

In a very thought-provoking book,⁵ Bruno Bettelheim discusses the importance of fairy tales for children, and his comments point to the way stories are helpful--in fact, essential--for all human beings. Bettelheim, a psychiatrist, has worked with children over the years, and has concluded that children have certain needs that fairy tales can help meet.

Just because his life is often bewildering to him, the child needs even more to be given the chance to understand himself in this complex world with which he must learn to cope. To be able to do so, the child must be helped to make some coherent sense out of the turmoil of his feelings. He needs ideas on how to bring his inner house into order, and on that basis be able to create order in his life.⁶

A child is continually confronted with the inner pressures and frustrations that he/she does not really know how to handle. Sometimes it seems like there is no answer, and the problems become overwhelming. By reading or listening to fairy tales a child sees other individuals confronted with serious problems, too, but sees how they manage to work out an acceptable solution. A good fairy tale will stimulate a child's imagination and encourage a kind of daydreaming that can help the child realize that his/her problems can have a good solution. In Bettelheim's words:

⁵Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Knopf, 1976).

⁶Ibid., p. 5.

. . . a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams--ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. It is here that fairy tales have unequaled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life.⁷

One important aspect in this process is the fact that fairy tales do not avoid evil and unpleasant facts. The death of a parent, bad brothers and sisters, the presence of giants (parent-figures?), all of these fairy tale events are real ones that a child will face, or fears he/she will face. In confronting these forces of evil and reaching a solution, the fairy tale gets across an important message to the child

. . . that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence--but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.⁸

Bettelheim concludes that if children heard or read more good fairy tales, they would be better able to handle the problems of life that come their way. And they would have a stronger sense of order and meaning in life, which is vital.

But it is not just children who have a need for order and meaning in life. All human beings, at whatever age, need to have the

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 8.

feeling that their lives make sense, that they fit somewhere, that they belong to life. The popularity of Alex Haley's Roots illustrates the value that people gain by knowing who they are and where they come from. People with no knowledge of their background are more likely to have a sense of "lostness" and the feeling that they do not belong. Their identity may be strengthened by discovering who they are in terms of their ancestry. . . . Another bit of evidence that points to the need for order and meaning in life is the vivid presence in our society today of cults and sects which are very authoritarian and offer clear-cut answers for life's decisions. People are attracted to astrology, for example, because it gives order to life by telling them, in a sense, what they should do each day. When people are drifting, it is comforting to have someone or something tell them what to do or what not to do. Some religious groups appeal to people because they meet this need, too.

Order and meaning, then, are essential for all human beings. Some like a very tight order with a rigid schedule and precise planning, others prefer a much looser order with lots of flexibility. But everyone has--or desires--some order in life. As Mary Shideler states:

Of the basic needs of mankind, the first is for order and meaning, for a world in which things can be fitted together intelligibly. Most of us do not see a universal pattern in what goes on around and within us; it is all we can do to make sense out of our own small spheres. Our fundamental need, however, is not so much to comprehend what the all-embracing pattern is or is like, but to know that order and meaning are possible, because only in an ordered and meaningful world can our lives have "the assurance of form" instead of running hither and thither, held together by nothing except accident or sheer force of will.⁹

⁹Mary McDermott Shideler, "The Story-makers and the Story-tellers," Religion in Life, XLV (Autumn 1976), 354.

This need for order and meaning is met through the stories that people tell to describe and define who they are.¹⁰

Stories That Define a Culture

Every culture is built upon certain stories that the people tell about themselves. In America we talk about Columbus and his trip of discovery, we tell about the Pilgrims and their desire for religious freedom, we remember the colonists and their desire to be free from the oppression of the king. All of these stories, and many more, are part of a larger story that tells us that we live in a land of freedom, where every person has the opportunity to be a success (the Great American Dream), and where people are concerned about human rights. Political leaders refer to these stories often, and sometimes foreign policy is guided by them. Our culture is no different from any other. We all have stories that tell us--and others--who we are and how we see ourselves.

The traditional word for these stories that are the foundation of any culture is "myth." John Crossan points out that "myth" often has a bad connotation, and this must be discarded:

Myth is not used here in its ordinary popular usage as synonymous with sophisticated lying. Neither is it used to mean stories with gods and goddesses in them, simply because such personalities appear in the stories.¹¹

¹⁰This discussion about fairy tales may point to one reason for the tremendous appeal of television soap operas. They are stories with one event following another, and they do not avoid the sordid in life. Perhaps the viewers gain a sense that "if they can survive, so can I."

¹¹John Dominic Crossan, The Dark Interval (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 48.

A myth is simply the story that is told by the people of a culture that describes their perspective on life. Often a real myth of a culture is not a story that is actually told, yet it is there. It may be that only outsiders who can look at the culture objectively can tell the story. Crossan defines myth succinctly when he says that "myth establishes world."¹² Without a myth we would live in a vacuum. Our myth gives order to our world.

Stephen Crites chooses not to use the word "myth," and probably for good reason, because of its varied connotations, so he writes about "sacred stories."

I propose, with some misgivings, to call these fundamental narrative forms sacred stories, not so much because gods are commonly celebrated in them, but because men's sense of self and world is created through them.¹³

These stories, says Crites, are not stories that we can make up and create. They exist in our culture and we discover them, or "awaken" to them. They are the foundation on which we all live. They provide the structure in which our lives move day by day. Sam Keen, referring to the work of Mircea Eliade, described how these sacred stories functioned in primitive culture:

The story served the diverse functions of philosophy, theology, history, ethics, and entertainment. It served to locate the individual within the concentric circles of the cosmos, nature, the community, and the family, and it provided a concrete account of what was expected of a man and what he might expect in that darkness which lies beyond death.¹⁴

The sacred stories that serve as the basis of our culture meet these same needs. Without these stories our culture would disintegrate.

¹²Ibid., p. 49.

¹³Crites, p. 295.

¹⁴Keen, p. 87.

Stories That Subvert Order and Meaning

Not all stories, however, "establish world." There are stories that do not bring order and meaning to life, but tend to destroy the order that is already there. They attack the order and seek to undermine it. The name for a story that "subverts world" is "parable."¹⁵

A parable is commonly thought of as a "brief narrative which forcefully illustrates a single idea."¹⁶ Jesus told parables, we assume, because it was an effective way of getting across a point. Most commentators of the twentieth century have followed Julicher's idea that a parable reflects a real slice of life and always seeks to convey a single thought.

John Crossan, however, suggests that a parable can best be understood as the opposite of story or myth. Story establishes world and provides meaning. A parable seeks to undercut that world. Crossan might refer to Mark 4:11-12, where Mark reports Jesus saying:

To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven.

Jesus told parables to shake people up, to undermine their ordered and structured world, to challenge what they accepted.

Parables give God room. The parables of Jesus are not historical allegories telling us how God acts with mankind; neither are they moral example-stories telling us how to act before God and towards one another. They are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world and thereby render clear and evident to us the

¹⁵Crossan, p. 59.

¹⁶L. Mowrey, "Parable," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), III, 649.

relativity of story itself. They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God. It is only in such experiences that God can touch us, and only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive.¹⁷

People tell stories to bring order and meaning to their world. Parables are used when it is necessary to undermine the stories that are being told. This is why Jesus used the parable: he wanted to cut into the myths or sacred stories of the "religious" people of his day because they blocked God out. And so today, people who find our present sacred stories unacceptable will tell parables or act out parables (as Jesus did) to get their point across. They want to change the nature of our sacred story, which is no easy task, for it takes a dramatic effort to make inroads on the accepted sacred story of any culture. Stephen Crites, in writing about this, suggests that we normally use a different word to speak about the situation when people act out parables in order to bring about changes in our sacred stories: "I think that 'revolution' is the name that a post-modern consciousness gives to a new sacred story."¹⁸

Stories Emphasize Uniqueness

A second important function of stories, besides providing order and meaning for life, is their emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual. This is something all of us need to know. We like to believe that we are part of a larger group of people, that we belong, that we are not utterly different from everyone else. But we also need to believe that we are unique:

¹⁷Crossan, pp. 121-22.

¹⁸Crites, p. 311.

What one needs precisely is to come to the conviction that out of the myriad possibilities of a human life there is embodied in one's own story sufficient particularity to mark one as an authentic individual human being who does not simply replicate some inevitable round of existence.¹⁹

It is fine if we all wear faded blue jeans, but we want someone to see us as special. And stories help provide this sense of being special.

In one of the great studies on narrative literature, Erich Auerbach²⁰ has used the writers of the gospels as examples of how narrative literature--the story form--succeeds in emphasizing uniqueness. Auerbach focuses on the person of Peter, and by comparing the stories about him with classical literature of that time, notes that only in the story of Peter do we see a common, ordinary, fallible human being as the center of attention. The gospel writers did not choose royalty and privileged people for their leading characters, but gave dignity to the ordinary man by writing about people such as Peter. William Beardslee notes that Auerbach, as a student of literature, finds great importance in the "ability of this form of narrative to endow the life of the ordinary person with ultimate seriousness."²¹ This was not the usual way of writing in those days:

. . . a tragic figure from such a background, a hero of such weakness, who yet derives the highest force from his very weakness,

¹⁹James B. Wiggins, "Within and Without Stories," in his Religion as Story (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 17.

²⁰Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953)

²¹William Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 23.

such a to and fro of the pendulum, is incompatible with the sublime style of classical antique literature.²²

The story form, as it developed from the gospels in the New Testament, stresses the importance and uniqueness of the individual.

This emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual can be seen easily when thinking about people telling their own stories.

The technique of storytelling and the psychology which underlies them rest on a discovery of the obvious: that what all persons have in common is their uniqueness. Every person has a story to tell. That's what makes a person.²³

The very act of beginning to tell one's own story will necessarily point how unique the individual is, that he/she is like no one else, but is special and different. Our own stories may show how we belong to a group and are like others, but no one else can ever tell his or her story exactly as I tell mine. The uniqueness of the individual prevents this. Thus storytelling helps meet this important need of all human beings, to be aware of their own uniqueness.

Telling Our Own Stories

This leads to an important function of storytelling for human experience, the value people can gain from telling their own stories. Earlier in this chapter the subject of sacred stories was discussed. They provide the structure we need, so that we will feel like we "fit" in a particular culture. They give us a sense of order and larger meaning that we need. But it is in learning to tell our own stories

²²Auerbach, p. 37.

²³Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox, Telling Your Story (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973), p. 2.

that we see where we fit. Our story provides the uniqueness we must have. Sallie TeSelle refers to the relationship between the two:

We learn who we are through the stories we embrace as our own-- the story of my life is structured by the larger stories (social, political, mythic) in which I understand my personal story to take place.²⁴

Many writers have stressed the importance of telling our stories. "I have found," writes James Hillman, "that the person with a sense of story built in from childhood is in better shape than one who has not had stories. . . . Story coming on early puts a person into familiarity with the validity of story."²⁵ Harvey Cox states that testimony is a valuable form of storytelling:

Testimony means the telling and retelling of my story. This is not a merely marginal human need. Some psychologists believe it is an utterly central one. If people cannot tell and retell their story, they go mad."²⁶

One of the earliest and best examples of telling one's own story is the Confessions of St. Augustine.

Augustine was the first to probe deeply into the psyche, to substitute self-observation for observation of the world, and to feel that the story of the self alone was important enough to sustain a lengthy narrative. . . . After Augustine new depths of characterization were accessible to narrative artists whenever they could find the forms to contain and exploit them.²⁷

²⁴Sallie TeSelle, "The Experience of Coming to Belief," Theology Today, XXXII (June 1975), 160.

²⁵James Hillman, "The Fiction of History: A Round," in Wiggins, pp. 166-67.

²⁶Harvey Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 96.

²⁷Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 79.

Augustine was a Christian, but his use of the narrative form was a major development in the story as a literary genre.

Today we are more likely to use the term "autobiography" than "confession" to speak of the form which Augustine developed.

An autobiography is a story, the story of a life, and the best autobiographies are written precisely as a story, that is, as an ordering of events around a central focus. Like a good story, a good autobiography deals with a great unfamiliar, the mystery of the self, in and through the familiar, a multitude of events and circumstances.²⁸

As a person writes autobiography, he/she is telling about events that have taken place and is finding a way of pulling them together in some sort of unity and is relating the significance they have for that particular life. Telling one's own story fulfills the two-fold function of storytelling; it gives order and meaning to life, and emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual.

²⁸Sallie TeSelle, Speaking in Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 145.

Chapter 3

STORYTELLING AS A WAY OF SPEAKING ABOUT GOD

Professor: "Your first assignment for this class, due tomorrow, is a brief resumé of the Introduction to Church Dogmatics by Karl Barth, I/1, pp. 1-47. Be sure to read all of the foot-notes."

Continuing Education Summer Student (to student in next seat): "I think I will drop this course and take the one on 'The Modern Movie.'"

Student in Next Seat: "I understand that the students in that class have to see Oh God! tonight. I'll join you."

What is the best way to speak about God and what he has done among us? From the days of the early Church through the Apostolic Fathers, the Apologists, and many others down to our times, Christian people have asked this question and sought to come up with an answer. But Christians are not the only ones confronted with this question. All self-consciously religious people seek to speak about God in the best way they can. The results of their efforts are what we call theology, "God--words."

The general attitude of people towards theology is not exactly exciting. Theologians have spent a lot of time and thought in writing books which systematically cover this topic. They seek to write about God in as comprehensive a way as possible. Seminary students brace themselves for a long hard evening when the assignment before them is from the major works of Tillich or Barth or deWolf or Moltmann or Cobb. The reading can be stimulating, but it demands concentration and effort.¹

¹In one summer class on Kierkegaard at a reputable seminary, the enrollment was halved after the students learned that they would have to read two thousand pages in four weeks!

Lay people avoid such works like the plague.

This is not to suggest that systematic theology is unnecessary simply because it is difficult. We must have theologians who are continually seeking new ways of writing about God in a profound and precise manner. But is systematic theology the only way of writing about God? Is there not perhaps another way of speaking about God that can complement systematic theology and be more appealing?

The title of this chapter suggests the answer: storytelling is a very excellent way of speaking about God. As Hauerwas says, "if we are to learn to speak of God, we must learn to speak of him in stories."² When we want to write or talk about something that is unique and can never be described completely by talking about it, story is the best way to do it. "Stories are indispensable for those matters that deal with the irreducible particular--that which cannot be other than it is and thus cannot be accounted for by any other."³ And God is one of these particulars. Likewise, using stories to speak about God prevents us from being too abstract. Charles Rice notes that

in storytelling the symbol stays close to the experience from which it springs. This is all the more the case when the story is spoken. If, following Tillich, we understand that the sources of all theological language are in experience, in concrete human events, then theology has a great stake indeed in story, in a form of symbolizing which does not allow experience and speech to fly apart into the abstraction which characterizes theological language and even preaching.⁴

²Stanley Hauerwas, "Story and Theology," Religion in Life, XLV (Autumn 1976), 347.

³Ibid., p. 346.

⁴Charles Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXXI (Spring 1976), 190.

Rather than speaking about God systematically, we would do well to tell the story of what God has done and is doing.

Story is the Form Used by God's People

The classic statement about God and stories comes from Elie Wiesel: "God made man because he loves stories."⁵ And the evidence to which Wiesel might point is the Bible. When the people who felt they had been chosen by God sought to speak about this God, they chose the story form to tell about their experience and their understanding of him.

The centrality of story in the Bible has already been noted (Chapter 1). The Old Testament is the story of God's dealings with his people. It was, as Sanders notes, "the Jewish gospel which, in dialogue with the on-going believing communities of Jews wherever they might be, gives Jews both identity and a basic understanding of obedience."⁶ The Torah was so helpful to the Jewish people because, as a story, they were able to take it with them in exile when everything else that held them together (e.g., the Temple and the City) was destroyed.

The New Testament writers used the story form to speak of God, but not just because they had inherited that form from their Scriptures.

⁵Ibid. Rice attributes this statement to Elie Wiesel, but Mordell Klein says that Rabbi Nahaman of Bratslav is reputed to have made the comment. See Mordell Klein (ed.) Passover (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), p. 48.

⁶James A. Sanders, "Torah and Christ," Interpretation, XXIX (October 1975), 380.

As Sallie TeSelle suggests, they

saw something unfamiliar and strange coming clear to them in and through the mundanity of a human life. They saw the word of God coming to them through the events and sayings and stories of the man Jesus. They saw it that way and reported it that way, not stripping the husk from the kernel or translating it into general existentialist terms or systematizing it into statements about God, but following the way it had come to them.⁷

The people of the early church who wrote the New Testament chose the story form because it seemed to them the natural and best way to speak about the God that had touched their lives. Amos Wilder points out that they saw the good news coming to them with a two-fold characteristic: "the new speech and speech-forms of the Gospel followed the law of the Gospel and of Christ himself: humiliation and incognito."⁸ God came in Christ as a humble servant (so we are told in the nativity stories and in the early church hymn which Paul uses in Philippians) and he came incognito, not recognized by the masses. The early church chose a humble speech-form: the gospel was not a classic literary form written in an educated style, but it was an accumulation of stories written in the common Greek. Also, the gospels were not written by famous authors. They were anonymous at first, and only later did church people feel a need to ascribe them to the revered apostles. Wilder is correct when he says that we should pay attention to the way the early Christians preferred to speak about God: "The character of the early Christian speechforms should have much to say to us with regard to our

⁷Sallie TeSelle, Speaking in Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 37.

⁸Amos N. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 37.

understanding of Christianity and its communication today."⁹ The fact that the biblical writers, both of the Old Testament and the New, wrote in the story form is a precedent we could do well to follow as we seek to speak about God.

From Doctrines to "Coming to Belief"

The story did not long continue to be the most popular literary genre of the early church. The message of Paul was narrative in the sense that he believed the Christ-event to be a final part of the story of God's actions as related in the Old Testament.¹⁰ The gospel writers chose the narrative form as their way of telling what God had done. Many little narratives were brought together into a single longer narrative, culminating in the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But even before the end of the period of the writing of the New Testament, there is evidence that the Christian message was not seen just as a story but also as a system of beliefs. The Pastoral Epistles talk about doctrines and beliefs in the way Paul and the gospels did not. In 1 Timothy the author requests his readers to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine."¹¹ The Epistle of Titus comes at this in a positive way: "But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine."¹² By this time the leaders of the church felt a need

⁹Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹⁰A fuller explanation of Paul's conversion appears at the end of this chapter.

¹¹1 Timothy 1:3

¹²Titus 2:1

to define the Christian beliefs and to defend them against incorrect teaching. They were beginning to speak of God not just with narratives about what he had done, but in terms of propositions and doctrines that correctly described him.

"Right belief" became a major preoccupation in the church as the second century continued and as the church moved into the following centuries. The church leaders wanted to decide what was orthodox belief and what was not so that the church could be protected against heretical beliefs that could tear it apart. The Church Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries made great strides forward in this task. And it was no doubt necessary for the on-going life of the church.

The writings of the Christian faith lost the dynamic quality that led to the creation of the gospels in narrative forms. The story of Jesus Christ may have remained alive in the worship of the churches, but the literature of the church was very doctrinally oriented. Discussion about God was carried on in terms of beliefs and doctrines and the attempt to come up with correct ways of defining what God was like.

As the years went by, some theologians were able to venture out of this mode and write about God in a more narrative way. Augustine told about his experience of God in his "Confessions," a form of autobiography (See Chapter 2). He did not--in this work--seek to tell all he could about God, but shared his experience of how God had touched his life. Sallie TeSelle mentions several theologians who did not just write about doctrines.

We might include, to name a few, the Augustine of the 'Confessions,' John Woolman, Luther, Schleiermacher, Jonathan Edwards, Kierkegaard, Teilhard de Chardin, and Bonhoeffer. These theologians share

several characteristics, though not of course all to the same degree or with the same emphasis. First, they use highly metaphorical language, aware that such language is the way to bring their readers to insight, to confrontation with the word of God."¹³

TeSelle speaks of metaphor as the basis of the story form. A metaphor is a figure of speech which provides a glimpse of truth in a way that can never be explained but only heard. "A metaphor does not have a message, it is a message."¹⁴

There is no way you can remove the metaphor and still convey the message, "it is not expendable."¹⁵ The theologians who use metaphor have sought (and still seek) to share their understanding of God in a creative way, appealing not just to their readers' intellect but also to their imagination. It is not enough to hold correct doctrines about God. That approach will always fall short of describing God in all his greatness. The best thing we can do is to speak of him in metaphors and stories, in hopes that the listeners can catch a glimpse of how God acts and what he is like.

TeSelle prefers to use the phrase "the process of coming to belief." She writes that

what is at stake in Christianity is not belief in doctrines correctly stated, but 'believing,' a process which is more like a story than it is like a doctrine. As Richard R. Niebuhr says, 'Believing belongs to experience. . . . It arises in the times of testing in which human faithfulness takes shape and becomes tangible as an affection.' Metaphor as the way human beings get from here to there, from, in this instance, unbelief to believing, is what theological reflection is about; it is not primarily about formulations and systems. Believing has a narrative quality, for it is a process, usually a slow process, which moves from the

¹³TeSelle, pp. 83-84.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 45.

unsurprising to the surprising with the complexity and ambiguity, the stops and starts, the insights and the setbacks of a story.¹⁶

Perhaps the apostle Paul would agree with this statement. He did not claim to have arrived at the correct belief about God, implying that he knew all there was to know about God and Jesus Christ.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.¹⁷

This passage suggests that Paul saw belief in God not as something we reach, but as something we "press on toward." A similar dynamic element appears when we speak of "the process of coming to belief."

The Appropriateness of Story in Speaking About God

A close look at some characteristics of the story form can provide reasons why story is a good way to speak about God. A doctrine about God may be comprehensive and may guard against incorrect beliefs fairly well, but it cannot help but to have a static quality. A doctrine is like a still photograph: it fixes God in a single moment of time and holds him there. It is then possible to look at the still picture, study it, think about it, discuss it, and, if desired, revise it (by taking still another picture).

The God of the biblical faith, however, can be understood much better through the image of a movie: God is always in action and doing something. The Old Testament follows this pattern. There is always a

¹⁶Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁷Philippians 3:12-14

dynamic element involved; the Bible does not give us a static view of God, fixed in a single moment.

And this is one reason the story form is appropriate for speaking about God. Story has movement, it is dynamic, it describes events in the way God acts. We gain a truer picture when we describe what God has done than we do when we attempt to describe him in a fixed moment. James Barr, in exploring possible ways of coming at biblical theology, notes that the people of the Bible were telling about the God they already knew, and trying to make this God real for their descendants:

What you learn about God in the Bible is not the first contact with deity, it is new information about a person whom you already know. . . . in fact, this would imply that the reading of the story is the way to meet the God whom they met; and this might mean that the explication of story for itself, as a story, is the right form for a biblical theology.¹⁸

The story talks about a dynamic God in a dynamic way. Without the story, the sense of movement may be lost.

Along with this, the story comes to us at the level of the concrete and not the abstract. Charles Rice emphasizes "the theological importance of particular, concrete human experience,"¹⁹ and suggests that we should always keep this in mind. People may spend some time thinking about abstract ideas, but they live on a very earthy, concrete plane. Story is much more effective in reaching us where we really live. One of the elements that Erich Auerbach found in the New Testament gospel stories was the dignity they gave to everyday, common

¹⁸James Barr, "Story and History in Biblical Theology," Journal of Religion, LVI (January 1976), 16.

¹⁹Rice, p. 189.

persons: "the concrete ordinary person is presented with utmost seriousness."²⁰ Stories describe the situations of real persons, and it is much easier for readers to identify with what is happening in a story than with abstract ideas. Speaking about God in story is an effective way of helping the actions of God be real for people.

A story about God also has a much greater chance of being interesting to people than does a theological doctrine. Perhaps one of the greatest sins of preachers is to take the story of the exciting, dynamic action of a very-much-alive God and turn it into a boring sermon. The listeners may believe it is God who is boring and uninteresting, and not just the preacher. The story form, however, provides the opportunity to share an understanding of God in an interesting, stimulating way that really conveys the truth about God. Since our lives are stories, we can plug into a story about God much more easily than we can make sense out of doctrines. And we have a better chance of realizing that God is alive for us just as he was for the biblical people.

The Challenge of God's Story

It is good for theology to be interesting, but that is not enough. There are lots of interesting stories, and some may talk about God, but the end goal is not entertainment. The story of God and what he has done, to be important for us, must challenge our lives and lead

²⁰William Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 23.

us toward a new perspective, a new way of understanding, a new way of living. This is certainly what happened to the great people of the Bible, such as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah and Paul. They heard the story about God and they believed themselves to be part of the story and it radically changed their lives.

The story of God can lead us to expand our own story. Moses had a story to tell when he lived in Midian. It included lots of little stories that we know from Exodus 1 and 2. But it was when Moses sensed that the story of God and his own story came together--in a burning bush--that he realized that he had the responsibility to lead the people out of slavery. Moses' story was expanded tremendously as the story of God became real to him. . . . And so with our own. As we talk about God and his story the opportunity is always there that our story will be challenged and expanded and opened up to new possibilities.²¹

And sometimes our story may be changed so much that we end up with a new one. Several writers have suggested that the experience we often call "conversion" can be described as accepting a new story for our lives.

It therefore becomes evident that a conversion or a social revolution that actually transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in a man's story. The stories within which he has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of his personal story through a new story both the drama of his experience and his style of action must be reoriented. Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness.²²

²¹See Chapter Four.

²²Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of American Academy of Religion, XXXIX (September 1971), 307.

The biblical precedent for describing conversion as the acceptance of a new story can be seen in the apostle Paul. James A. Sanders discusses what happened to Paul in an article entitled "Torah and Christ."²³ Until the day he headed for Damascus, Paul told his story by saying that God had given the Torah as a law for the people to follow. Paul sought to follow the laws of the Torah as zealously as he could, even to the point of persecuting the new Christian sect because he knew they were breaking the rules of the Torah. On the day of his trip to Damascus, Paul came to realize that the Torah was primarily a story about what God had done for his people, and only secondarily a set of laws for the people to follow. God had led Abraham out of Haran and down to Palestine, God had called Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, and God had enabled the people to survive in the wilderness for forty years. This had all been part of Paul's earlier story, but now he realized that God had also acted in the Christ-event. As Paul came to understand the Torah as primarily story, he could see the Christ-event as part of the Torah-story and not as a challenge and threat to it. Paul's conversion came about because he now had a new story for his life.

The use of story, then, can provide us with a new way of speaking about the experience of conversion. Sometimes the presence of a new story in one's life causes an emotional and traumatic experience while for other people it sinks in gradually. But the result may be

²³James A. Sanders, "Torah and Christ," Interpretation, XXXIX (October 1975), 372-90.

the same: when a person adopts a new story about life and God, there will be a change. As Crites says, "his style must change steps, he must dance to a new rhythm."²⁴

Storytelling, then, is a good way to speak about God. It is not the only way to theologize, but it has many advantages. It follows the pattern set by the biblical people, it reaches out to our lives in dynamic and interesting ways, and it provides us a good way to understand and speak of religious conversion.

²⁴Crites, p. 307.

Chapter 4

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Laywoman: "Rev., my son is eleven years old and I want him to attend your pastor's class."

Minister: "I would be glad to have John in the class, Mrs. Smith. Has he expressed an interest?"

Laywoman: "Oh, yes, he wants to come. I told him that if he went to class every time and got some faith, we'd buy him a ten-speed."

A. THE STORY AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the field of Christian education, the pendulum swings back and forth between confidence and tentativeness. In some periods the authors write with confidence: "The leaders of Christian education are less confused than they have been for some years."¹ Before too long, however, that confidence is missing: "This book, then, is an invitation to engage ourselves in renewed conversations about the future of religious education."² Suggestions are made and they are valid ones, but we no longer see that same sense that the answers are present and waiting for those who read this or that particular book.

Today the pendulum leans heavily on the side of tentativeness. Many fine books are available that point to exciting and worthwhile things that are happening in the educational ministry of the church. But few authors claim to have the solutions for all the problems. The

¹D. Campbell Wyckoff, The Task of Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 13.

²John H. Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. x.

writings tend to say: "This seems to make sense and could prove helpful to others." Or, "this idea worked here, and might suggest ways for your situation, too." This is the spirit of the comments in this chapter, which suggest that as we seek to develop an effective program of Christian education in the church, the use of story can help us in our task.

The Task of Christian Education: People With Faith

Defining "faith" and how people "get it" is not an easy task. Luke reports that Jesus answered the apostles' request for faith by telling them a brief story: "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this sycamine tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you."³ He made no attempt to describe how they could get more faith.

The issue can, however, be clarified somewhat. One of this decade's most helpful writers in the field of Christian education, John H. Westerhoff, makes a distinction between religion and faith.

Faith is deeply personal, dynamic, ultimate. Religion, however, is faith's expression. For example, religion is concerned about institutions (churches), documents, statements of belief (Bible and theology), and our convictions and moral codes. Religion is important, but not ultimately important. Educationally, religion is a means not an end; faith is the only end. Faith, therefore, and not religion, must become the concern of Christian education.⁴

Another writer, William B. Abernethy, makes a similar distinction when he writes about the teaching about religion and the teaching of religion.

³Luke 17:5-6

⁴Westerhoff, pp. 21-22.

The teaching about religion is the objective presentation of religion as a part of the total body of human knowledge which human-kind has accumulated over the course of the centuries and which believer and nonbeliever alike should know as a part of being educated. . . . The teaching of religion, on the other hand, involves the ways in which the religious community passes on its own way of life--its history, beliefs, rituals, and traditions--to potential believers or to actual believers who wish to deepen their participation in that way of life.⁵

Faith, then, is something dynamic. It involves a person's total self, and is more than intellectual assent to a set of beliefs. William Clifton Moore tries to encompass the full scope of the word "faith" when he says that

it is in the binding of the self and the transcendent in a total response in which the whole person is oriented to one's self, to one's neighbor, and to the universe so that all perceiving, feeling, and acting are in terms of a transcendent dimension.⁶

These statements suggest that faith is not something we can teach the way we teach about religion or teach about the Bible. A person can know a lot about the Bible and not have faith. Likewise, a person can have faith in God and not have a very sophisticated understanding of the Bible. Like Jesus, we can tell a story about a person with faith, but we cannot give faith to another. As a popular expression says: "Faith is not taught but caught."

Many church education programs do not give serious enough consideration to this truth, which is a main reason for their difficulty these days. Westerhoff is less than subtle when he says "that the

⁵William Beaven Abernethy, A New Look for Sunday Morning (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 78-79.

⁶William Clifton Moore, "A Developmental Approach to Faith," Nexus 50, XVIII (Spring 1975), 27.

schooling-instructional paradigm is bankrupt."⁷ Church educators have tried to teach people faith the way the schools teach other subjects, and it is not possible. A whole new approach is needed. James D. Smart suggested that the typical church school's approach to teaching the Bible has been so inconsistent with the true nature of the faith to which the Bible witnesses that "it is not surprising that the church school has more often contributed to the silencing of the Scriptures than to a genuine understanding of them."⁸ We have in the past assumed that we could teach faith, but are discovering--again and again--that it cannot be done. "Faith can be inspired within a community of faith, but it cannot be given to one person by another."⁹

Leading People to Faith: Some Clues

Recent study has suggested that one of the best ways to understand how people acquire faith is to speak in terms of "faith development." People do not receive faith in the way they receive a gift; it develops and grows according to certain definable stages. By understanding how faith develops in people, we are in a better position to facilitate this growth to take place.

The concept of development within individuals is not a new one. Erik Erikson has presented an eight-stage format of how a person

⁷Westerhoff, p. 23.

⁸James D. Smart, The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 170.

⁹Westerhoff, p. 23.

develops from an infant to the final moments of life.¹⁰ Other writers have been able to outline our moral development.¹¹ James W. Fowler III has followed this lead and has suggested a six-stage development of faith within persons.¹² These are stages, he says, through which everyone progresses as their faith develops within them. All people do not progress to the same stage in their lifetime, but those who reach the higher stages must go through the lower stages first.

Much work remains to be done in this area of faith development, but if we accept the plausibility of the concept, we will begin to explore how we can help people at various stages in faith development to grow toward the next stage. And we will seek to find the best context and setting in which to encourage and support this growth.

The context in which people grow in faith is of crucial importance to many writers, including John Westerhoff. In dismissing the schooling-instructional setting for Christian education because of its failure, Westerhoff puts forward a model which he calls "a community of faith-enculturation paradigm!"¹³ He suggests that the best way to bring

¹⁰Erik Erikson, "Identity and Life Cycle," Psychological Issues I (1959). A chart relating these stages to the life of the church is in Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Groups (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 138-42.

¹¹The ideas of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg are described in Ronald Duska and Mariellen Whelan, Moral Development, A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg (New York: Paulist Press, 1975)

¹²James W. Fowler, "Faith Development Theory and the Aims of Religious Socialization," in Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith (eds.) Emerging Issues in Religious Education (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 187-208.

¹³Westerhoff, p. 50.

people to faith is through involving them in a community of faith.

A viable paradigm or model for religious education needs to focus upon the radical nature of a Christian community where the tradition is faithfully transmitted through ritual and life, where persons as actors--thinking, feeling, willing, corporate selves--are nurtured and converted to radical faith, and where they are prepared and motivated for individual and corporate action in society on behalf of God's coming community.¹⁴

People will develop in faith as they are involved in a community of faith where they see people with faith that is alive and meaningful and significant.

This conclusion is similar to that reached by William B. Abernethy in the congregation he serves in Connecticut. The goal of church education, he believes, "is seen as the passing on of a way of life rather than the objective presentation of accumulated knowledge."¹⁵ The leaders of that congregation have sought to involve their young people in the worship and total life of the parish so that they will see themselves as part of a community of faith. This is the context which they believe will help the youth gain a live faith of their own.

The environment or setting for church education is a vital factor in the thinking of John and Lela Hendrix. They want to provide a situation in which learners find the security to discover and explore their own meanings. "Faith is not something that can be poured into a person, but it becomes present to a person if we have enough trust to allow him to explore life in his own way."¹⁶ While they do not use the

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 49-50.

¹⁵Abernethy, p. 80.

¹⁶John and Lela Hendrix, Experiential Education: X-ED (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 164.

phrase "community of faith," the characteristics they desire for the setting of church education would often be found in the community of faith as Westerhoff envisions it.

As we consider the issue, then, of how we lead people to faith, we need to give attention to the setting or context.¹⁷ The environment, the strength and nature of the faith of the people with whom the learners will relate, and the sense of commitment and community of the people are factors which deserve primary importance. Learners are unlikely to grow in faith when they are living and participating among people whose lives do not show a strong faith for them to model. Westerhoff quotes C. Ellis Nelson in a good summarizing statement:

Faith is communicated by a community of believers and the meaning of faith is developed by its members out of their history, by their interaction with each other, and in relation to the events that take place in their lives.¹⁸

The Role of Story for a Community of Faith

A community of faith gets its identity from the story it tells about itself. A group of people becomes a community as they have a common tradition. Their story is what distinguishes them from other groups and provides a sense of oneness and a feeling of "we are in it together." In the church, Westerhoff says, "the tradition we bear as a faith community is essentially and primarily a story, a story of God's

¹⁷The word "setting" does not refer as much to the actual physical setting as the people involved and their relationship with each other and with God.

¹⁸Westerhoff, p. 51.

mighty deeds and actions in history."¹⁹ This story about what God has done is what makes the church different from other communities which do not tell the same story.

The significance of the story for a community of faith has often been neglected, and the result has been the loss of a sense of identity. As the church, we must know our story and be able to tell it or we run the danger of just being another club or lodge.

Unless the story is known, understood, owned, and lived, we and our children will not have Christian faith. . . . Storytelling needs to become a natural and central part of church life, and we must learn to tell God's story as our story.²⁰

Westerhoff comes on strong with the importance of the story for the church. We have a story to tell about what God has done, and we should conscientiously work at telling the story effectively.

The church is the bearer of that story. And when that story becomes our story we will know what the name Christian means. Education is concerned that the story be known and owned; it is concerned that this story be understood and applied.²¹

The biblical story is the foundation on which the church has been established, and it must continue to be alive so that the church can be a real community of faith and not just a group of like-minded people.

We have, however, more than one story to tell in the church. The primary story is The Story, the biblical story, but there are also important secondary stories. One of these is the story of the history of the church since New Testament times. The Christian faith did not just jump over nineteen centuries: it grew and developed amid pain and

¹⁹Ibid., p. 69.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 34 and 75.

²¹Ibid., p. 71.

suffering, and this story of the church can help us understand our connection with the faith of those who lived in New Testament and apostolic times. Another important story is the story of our particular denomination: this locates our own community of faith at a more specific place within the story of the church as a whole. This is not to imply that our denominational story is better than someone else's: we each have our story to tell, with the good and the bad in it, and we need to be able to tell it to give us a location in the church. Finally, there is the story of our particular local congregation. This story is important, too, for it places us not just within a group of churches but at a specific location and at a time in history which we remember. Further, we--and other people we know personally--have helped create the story of our congregation, and this makes the story even more real to us. . . . The more the people of a local congregation are able to tell all of these stories, the more they will see themselves to be a community of faith.

Story, then, is very important for the life of the church as a community of faith. Our task is to "again become a history-bearing community of faith and a storytelling people who seek to communicate God's story as our story."²² As we do this we will be strengthening our sense of community and providing the best context for the newer adults and young people within the congregations to grow in their own faith. Story is vital for a community of faith, and therefore is indispensable for leading people to faith by establishing the setting in which faith can develop.

²²Ibid., p. 75.

B. USING STORY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

As we think about how to use stories effectively in the life of the church, one general comment is in order. People who create stories and tell them well are the ones who can let their imagination and creativity run loose and guide their thinking. There is what might be called "the spirit of storytelling," and this spirit encourages the use of the imagination and it continually strives to be creative. As Scholes and Kellogg pointed out, all really good narrative involves some degree of artistry and creativity. It is more than just repeating facts. In writing about history and biography they said:

Those histories and biographies which aspire to artistic status tend to move away from merely chronological narrative toward more esthetically satisfying patterns. This means, in effect, that historical narrative will borrow mythical or fictional means of articulation to the extent that it is willing to sacrifice science to art. The artistically minded historian or biographer, even before he writes a word, is looking for esthetically satisfying patterns in the people and events he considers as potential subjects for his work. And every historian or biographer who hopes to reach an audience beyond his fellow professionals is to some extent artistically minded.²³

In the church, the spirit of storytelling would lead us to use our creative and imaginative talents as much as possible. In stressing this point, John Drury says that "we would be nearer to the life and spirit of the New Testament if we were more imaginative and creative."²⁴ The early church was certainly forced to use their creativity and

²³Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 217.

²⁴John Drury, "The Spirit of Storytelling," Theology, LXXIX (March 1976), 83.

imagination: they had no years of tradition to follow. And this is a good guideline today.

One of the major blocks that makes it difficult to be creative and imaginative in the church is the press of time. It is much easier to preach an S O S sermon²⁵ than to wrestle with a new and creative format. Likewise, special classes and church school lessons take much less time to prepare if we do it the same way we have before. In order to be more creative it will be necessary to set aside special time to "let the juices run" and follow our creative urges. . . . And if we want the spirit of storytelling to be alive in the church, this will be time well spent!

Story and Bible Study

Two points need to be considered as we think about how Bible study in the local parish can be influenced by understanding the Bible as The Story of what God has done. We need to put more concentration on storytelling itself and we need to emphasize the value of helping people see the overall story of the Bible.

Normally Christian educators do not spend much time and effort encouraging people to be good storytellers. There is the comment in the Teacher's Book of almost any curriculum that "the Teacher should tell the story rather than read it to the students." And that is about all that is said. . . . Two seminary professors, Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, have developed what they call a "Storytelling

²⁵"Same Old Stuff."

Workshop" as a means to help people become better storytellers.²⁶ From their experiences they have learned that telling and hearing a biblical story--told as a story--is a far better way of understanding what it means than reading it or hearing it read. These workshops could be most useful for church school leaders and preachers.

Secondly, since the Bible is The Story of what God has done, beginning with the call to Abraham and to Moses and continuing through the Davidic kingdom down to the Christ-event, the people in the church need to be able to comprehend The Story in this way. The ignorance of the Bible which the church has permitted²⁷ is partly because the people in the church have not been taught to see the Bible as a whole. They may know the story of Moses and the story of David killing Goliath and the story of Ezekiel and the wheels and many stories about Jesus and Paul, but by-and-large they are unable to relate the various stories in one larger story. For example, few church people can speak intelligently about the significance of the Exile for the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Therefore, a good program of Bible Study in the local parish should provide one or many ways for the people to gain an overview of the Bible story.²⁸ Only as they can see the total picture and understand

²⁶Thomas Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "Biblical Narrative Recital and Ministry." The authors are professors at New York Theological Seminary. The former mailed me a copy of the paper without publication information.

²⁷Smart, Chapter V.

²⁸As Lambert suggests, "to use the Bible responsibly we must view each part of it in relation to other parts and to the Bible as a whole." Herbert Lambert, Getting Inside the Bible (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1976), p. 135.

the sense of movement through it can they understand the place and significance of the many stories that occur throughout the Bible.²⁹

Along with this, it is important for people to know why the Bible was written. It is helpful to have some understanding of the role the Scriptures played in the lives of those who created them. John Crossan, in writing a theology of story, suggests that the purpose of myth is to "establish world."³⁰ The myths or sacred stories we accept provide a sense of order and meaning for our lives. They give us a tradition and something to hang on to when times are difficult. This, essentially, is what the Bible does. James Sanders tells us that it was the stories and traditions which helped the exiled people survive that became for them Holy Scripture.³¹ Without the stories that had been handed down they would not have been able to make it as an identifiable community. Likewise, the stories we have in the New Testament are the ones that helped the early church survive. It was their "life-line," that which gave them the encouragement to go on. The biblical stories which are now our Scriptures are those stories which gave some sense and meaning to the people then (and they continue to do that same thing for us, hopefully). The story of the Bible "establishes world"

²⁹This is not to suggest that all of the books of the Bible show a theological unity. There is much diversity. But most of them can be placed with some degree of accuracy at a particular place within the total story.

³⁰See Chapter Two.

³¹See James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). The stories that helped the people survive became their Holy Scriptures.

for us as it did for them.

This understanding is important because it can help us ask the right questions about the Bible. When people think of the Bible as story, far too often they are inclined to ask: "Did it really happen?" Whereas a better question is: "What does the story mean?" The former question can lead to useless and divisive arguments. The latter question points toward a deeper understanding of how God works among people. Whereas lay people can and should be encouraged to face the historical questions directly (and use the critical tools available), it is not necessary to force these questions on people before they are ready and able to accept them. A worthwhile approach is to present the stories of the Bible and discuss what they meant to the authors and early readers and what they can mean for us today.

As we deal with the hermeneutical question (how we are to understand what the Bible says to us), story can provide a useful guide. When we speak of a story as myth, we say that it "establishes world," it provides order and meaning. But the Bible also has many stories which are parable and not myth. And parable, as Crossan noted, "destroys world."³² The purpose of a parable is to undercut the myth that people live by, to shake them up, to penetrate through the usual way of thinking in order to suggest a new thought. As Sallie TeSelle said, Jesus not only told parables, but his life was a parable. "His task was not to impart correct concepts about the kingdom but to make it possible for men to respond to it. . . He not only tells shocking stories but

³²See Chapter Two.

leads a shocking life toward a shocking end."³³ We should expect, then, whenever we hear or read the Bible, to hear something that shocks us rather than that which makes us feel good. John D. Crossan says: "You can usually recognize a parable because your immediate reaction will be self-contradictory: "I don't know what you mean by that story but I'm certain I don't like it."³⁴ If we translate this thought into a principle of biblical interpretation, "we do not listen just for what pleases us. Indeed, we learn to watch for what displeases us, what is most alien to us, since our interest is explicitly in being altered."³⁵ The same point has been made in another way:

whenever our reading of a biblical passage makes us feel self-righteous we can be sure that we have misread it. . . . whenever our reading of a biblical passage brings home to us the poignant judgment and salvation of God's humility we can be confident we have read it correctly.³⁶

Understanding the Bible as story, then, should lead us to see the Bible as one story within which we find many stories, and these speak to us as we seek to understand their original meaning and how they were used by the author as well as how they confront our lives.

³³Sallie TeSelle, Speaking in Parables (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 82.

³⁴John D. Crossan, The Dark Interval (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1975), p. 56.

³⁵Walter Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 73.

³⁶James A. Sanders, "The New History: Joseph, Our Brother," an address delivered to the Annual Luncheon of The Ministers and Missionaires Benefit Board of the American Baptist Convention, May 29, 1968. He was quoting himself from the Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XX (1965), 350-60.

Telling Our Own Story

The importance of telling our own story was discussed earlier (see Chapter 2). Our story makes us unique, for we are the only one that can tell this exact story. Telling our story helps us know who we are: "A man's sense of identity seems largely determined by the kind of story which he understands himself to have been enacting through the events of his career, the story of his life."³⁷ This is a similar point to that made by Harvey Cox when he emphasizes the importance of testimony. "Testimony is me telling my story in a world of people with stories to tell."³⁸

Some churches encourage people to tell their own story in testimony, while others find this format unacceptable. But this is not the only way the church can help people tell their stories. Sam Keen, who has done a lot of work in this area, says that the first step is to grant permission to people to tell their story. "Each of us has a story, but few have had audiences before whom it was appropriate to share intimate and meaningful history."³⁹ There are many groups in the church--pastor's class, women's group, church school classes, special courses--in which participants can be invited to write out the story of

³⁷TeSelle, p. 139, quoting Stephen Crites, "Myth, Story, History," in Parable, Myth and Language (Cambridge, MA: Church Society for College Work, 1968), 68.

³⁸Harvey Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 97.

³⁹Sam Keen, To a Dancing God (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 72.

their lives in various ways, and then share the parts which they choose with others. This format allows individuals to share as little or as much as they like (and thus protects their privacy). Also, there are some relational Bible study units available that suggest exercises which lead people to tell a part of their life story.⁴⁰

The value of telling our own story is two-fold (at least). First, we may begin to see some order and meaning in our lives that we had not noticed before, and this may lead us to make some changes: "to become what I am not, I must start with what I am; but by seeing a pattern emerging in the tapestry I can weave it now more clearly, I can choose to become my emerging self."⁴¹ Secondly, as we hear the stories of others, we may get a better glimpse of who we are.

And the stories of others help also, for what we want from other autobiographies is finally self-knowledge. Not only from my own story do I learn who I am, but also from the stories of others. "What one seeks in reading autobiography is not a date, a name, or a place, but a characteristic way of perceiving, or organizing, and of understanding, an individual way of feeling and expressing that one can somehow be related to oneself." Thus we have answered the question why we read autobiographies--they help us to reflect on ourselves.⁴²

The church should encourage people to tell their own stories and to learn what they can from the stories of others. This will help people know who they are, and put them into a better position to learn who God is and what God wants from them.

⁴⁰See Appendix A.

⁴¹TeSelle, p. 150.

⁴²Ibid. The quotation is from Olney, Metaphors of Self, p. 37.

Comparing Our Story with The Story

As TeSelle says, we need to be able to tell our stories 1) so that we will know who we are, and, 2) so that we will be able to make some changes in our lives and grow more intentionally. Life involves many changes, both physically and emotionally and spiritually. The persons who are in touch with their own stories are better able to understand the changes and find a pattern in their lives and thus are in a better position to anticipate the changes yet to come. They are less likely to drift along in life, just reacting to what happens in whatever way seems most natural. If we can tell our story and know who we are, we will have a better chance to choose the direction our lives will take in the future.

As we begin to compare our stories with those of others, there are two possible results. First, we may find that their stories confirm and strengthen ours. They may even describe things in such a way that we can see our story more clearly. This can be very supportive.⁴³ Secondly, however, we may discover that someone else's story is very threatening to us. As Robert McAfee Brown warned,

My normative story may be rudely challenged by another story or by several stories. It may be so badly shattered that I must painfully reconstruct a new story for myself, either out of the debris of my former story or by using materials that come from one or another of the stories that created my predicament.⁴⁴

⁴³A recent phone call from a fellow student working on his professional project was quite supportive to me. He related how slowly the project was coming. He was having to grind it out, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, a hard, slow process. That was my story, too, and by comparing our stories we helped each other to "keep at it."

⁴⁴Robert McAfee Brown, "My Story and 'The Story'," Theology Today, XXXII (June 1975), 167.

Comparing our story with those of others is bound to be productive, but we can never be sure beforehand exactly what the result will be.⁴⁵

In church education, comparing our story with The Story is one of the best ways of encouraging growth and positive change. We may not want to compare our story with that of the person across the tracks, but we may have enough trust in the Bible to let it challenge our story. We need, first, to look at the biblical story and seek to understand (as well as we can) the context of its writing and why the author wrote it. Then we can ask how it speaks to our life and situation. "Relational Bible Study" is a term used to describe a method whereby we seek to let some of the important issues of a Bible story pose questions for our lives.⁴⁶

If we do not just choose our favorite passages for relational Bible study, we will discover that certain themes show up again and again in the Bible, and that we must acknowledge that these deserve special significance, and that we should let them challenge our stories. Amos N. Wilder even suggests that there may be only a single theme:

Sometimes one is tempted to think that there is only one story in the world summed up in the formula of 'lost and found,' and that all the stories long and short in the New Testament or the Bible itself are variations on this theme.⁴⁷

⁴⁵But perhaps we can have an idea. Congregations may tend to be made up of people with a common background (e.g., White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestants, Blacks, or Spanish-Americans) because people instinctively know that there is less likelihood in such a group of finding someone with a story that disturbs their story too much.

⁴⁶See Appendix B for one example.

⁴⁷Amos N. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, The Language of the Gospel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 59.

Many stories in the Bible, when allowed to speak to (challenge) our stories would confront us with the questions: how have we been 'lost' and how have we been 'found'?

When we dare to look to people whose stories are different from ours, we may gain new insights about The Story of the Bible (and our story) that we had not deemed possible. "Liberation theology" has provided a theological framework for many Christians in the world today and some would suggest that the only valid way to come at the Bible is from the position of suffering and pain, for this was the perspective of the Israelites and those in the early church. Roger Cone suggests that "the only hermeneutical stance for reading the Bible was that of suffering and oppression."⁴⁸ The implication of this statement is that Christians who have not gone through the experience of suffering and oppression (e.g. most white American Christians) that some have had need to hear and listen to the story of those who know what suffering and oppression is all about (e.g. the Black in America and Latin American Christians). Robert McAfee Brown notes both the value and threat of such a comparison of stories:

All of these other stories both threaten and refine (even purge) my normative story. The black story tells me how much my Christian story has been tainted by my white story; the Third World story unmasks the uncritical way I have interwoven the American story and the Christian story, and so on. In principle, it is possible for one of these encounters--or a series of them--so to undermine the Christian story as to force me to discard it. But if that were to happen, it would not leave me bereft of any story (though

⁴⁸James C. Logan, Theology As A Source in Shaping the Church's Educational Work (Nashville: Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church, 1974), p. 26. The statement is Logan's interpretation of Cone and is not a direct quotation.

for a while it might seem that way). It would simply leave me with the necessity of painfully constructing the outlines of another story, or series of stories, that would become normative for me.⁴⁹

Telling our story and comparing our story with the stories of others and with The Story is not always "fun and games." It can be quite threatening. But it can also lead to the kind of growth and honest self-understanding that the church needs.

Story and Children

When we think of stories we think of children. Children spend a lot of time listening to and reading stories, and they should. And in the church stories from the Bible are an important part of the experience of children. They need to hear the great stories of the Bible, especially those of Jesus, told in fresh and exciting ways.

The use of the story form in church education as regards children, however, should involve more than just telling stories in Sunday School. One valuable way to reach children is to have them participate in the reenactment of The Story or parts of it. Children (and adults) need to be fully immersed in The Story so that it is part of them. This was the aim of that important verse, Deuteronomy 6:7, which spoke about the words of the Shema: "And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise." Robert McAfee Brown, in talking about the importance of reenacting The

⁴⁹Brown, p. 168.

Story, says that it is "only as we live it out will it be able to become our story as well."⁵⁰

The classic example of the reenactment of The Story is the Passover Haggadah, the story which the Jewish people to this day still tell each Passover. Year after year the children join in this special celebration in remembrance of the night on which the angel of death passed over the Hebrew people and they were finally able to leave their bondage in Egypt. Traditionally it is the youngest child who asks the question ("Why does this night differ from all other nights?") which leads into the narrative. Haggadah means "story," and it refers specifically to the story of the Exodus as told at Passover. This story is central in the education of Jewish children.

There are many opportunities throughout the Church Year to involve children in the reenactment of The Story. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Christ, and a Christmas Eve service, with candle-lighting and communion, can make a strong impact on children. After many years of a very impressionable worship service on Christmas Eve, children will not just know about the birth of Jesus, they will feel it. It can become their story. . . . Maundy Thursday is another good opportunity for a story-like service. The Tenebrae Service, in which the sanctuary is gradually darkened, is impressive. The story to be told is that of the Last Supper and imminent arrest and crucifixion. A procession by the whole congregation, carrying candles, to the cross (or crosses) outside the church building can also add impact to this

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 171.

service. Children become involved in the story by reenacting it. Such services have a much greater teaching value than just reading or telling the story.

Another way of reenacting The Story (or parts of it) is through simulations. The possibilities for creating simulations of biblical stories are unlimited.⁵¹ These simulations do not need to be sophisticated dramas with fancy costumes. Giving different parts to individual children (or groups) can help them get involved and to see the story from the inside. Then it has a much greater chance of becoming their story.

The work cited earlier (Chapter 2) by Bruno Bettelheim emphasizes the importance of providing children with opportunities to use their imagination and work through fantasies. Good stories can be helpful here, as Bettelheim mentioned in his discussion of fairy tales. But he gave one sound warning. Stories will lose their value when we moralize. If a story demands and threatens children it does not provide the needed emotional outlet that comes from fantasizing and using the imagination.

What a child needs most, when beset by jealousy of his sibling, is the permission to feel that what he experiences is justified by the situation he is in. To bear up under the pangs of his envy, the child needs to be encouraged to engage in fantasies of getting even someday; then he will be able to manage at the moment, because of the conviction that the future will set things aright.⁵²

A moralizing story implies or says to the child that he/she ought not

⁵¹See Appendices B and C for examples.

⁵²Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 52.

to feel this jealousy.

The warning about moralizing applies to the use of Children's Sermons in the worship service. Correctly understood, they can be invaluable 1) in helping children to feel that they belong in church and are an important part of the community of faith, and, 2) in adding a lively element to worship which everyone appreciates. But the temptation is to use the Children's Sermon to teach nice sweet moral lessons, encouraging children to "try harder to be good." If Children's Sermons do this, they will be resented; if they stimulate the child's imagination, they can do wonders.

Finally, there are many Bible stories that can be very helpful for children in growing in their faith. They deal with real feelings and create the kind of positive attitude that is helpful. As Bettelheim says, a good fairy tale must be optimistic, so that the child can see that no matter how bad the situation is, a victory is possible. This helps children see a good solution to the real problems that confront them. The story of Joseph is excellent because it deals with very real feelings (sibling jealousy) and it turns out in a good way (they hated his guts and tried to do him in, but in the end they all loved each other). The story of Jonah shows a real struggle that is not easily resolved, but finally is. David, the little one, defeats the giant (a parent figure?), and thus is loved by children. These stories, and others, can be most useful in helping children grow in faith. But they should not be used to moralize. The children will gain far more from a story if they are allowed some freedom to reach their own conclusions.

Preaching and Story

Using the story form as a model for preaching means more than just telling stories in a sermon or telling a story as a sermon (though both of these possibilities can have merit if done well). The story form suggests an approach in preaching, which is described by Ron Allen:

"Story" can mean either "storytelling" in the specific sense or it can also mean a way of looking at the text, at the congregation, and at the preaching event itself. One can preach from a Pauline ethical exhortation in the story genre just as one can preach from the story of blind Bartimaeus. Ethics, after all, is part of the human story. The story perspective brings into focus the need to be in touch with the symbols and realities of a local situation. One does not simply "use" stories or storytelling. As a genre and mode of thought it speaks to us on the deepest level when we can most profoundly perceive it.⁵³

Story as a guide for preaching provides us with an approach for all our preaching, whether we happen to tell many stories that Sunday or not.

For one thing, when the story form is the model, the preacher will be involved in the life of the people and community. Many professors of preaching have stressed this. Phillips Brooks defined preaching as "the communication of truth through personality."⁵⁴ This does not mean that the preacher is on a big ego-trip in the pulpit. It does mean that he/she is a real person with feelings that are not hidden and repressed. Rice also refers to Ralph Waldo Emerson's suggestions describing "the good preacher as a person who is alive to the world around

⁵³Unpublished paper, 1975, quoted in Charles Rice, "The Preacher as Storyteller," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, XXXI (Spring 1976), p. 194.

⁵⁴Rice, p. 192, quoting the Yale Lectures that Phillips Brooks had preached.

himself or herself, open to the metaphors being born there constantly, and willing to trust the commonplace experience of daily life as material for preaching."⁵⁵ Fred Craddock proposes a method of preaching which he calls "inductive preaching," and he emphasizes also that "it is essential that the minister really be a member of the congregation he serves."⁵⁶ An awareness of the importance of story for life will lead us to make sure that our sermons are not just intellectual exercises, but rooted deeply in the lives and feelings of the people.

Secondly, the story form as a model for preaching will help us be aware of the need for good movement in our sermons. A sermon should be less like an oratorical essay than it is like a journey. The preacher--as he/she thinks through and plans a sermon--takes a thought-journey, and would do well to take the people with him/her on that journey. This suggestion was made by Craddock who stresses the importance of the movement of a sermon, and likes the image of the preacher leading the people on a journey. And when they reach the end the preacher does not make the point for the people, but lets them work through their own conclusion. When we read or hear a good story we have to do some thinking when we reach the conclusion. "What does this mean for me?" we might ask. A good sermon should have the same result.

Further, the story as the model for preaching would encourage preachers to be as creative as possible. One of the most difficult

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 191.

⁵⁶Fred B. Craddock, As One Without Authority (Enid, OK: Phillips University Press, 1974), p. 83.

tasks in preaching today is to get and hold people's attention. They are involved in so many activities that their minds can very easily drift to something very different from the sermon, especially if it lacks much punch and life. The more creativity a preacher can use, the more likely he/she is to catch the attention of the people and hold it. The story form encourages this use of creativity.

Is there precedent for using story as the model for our preaching? Amos Wilder suggests that we can find it in the New Testament. The gospels and the anecdotes of which they are made (which can be called mini-gospels) were the sermons of the early church, and they were stories. The speeches of Acts were in story form, and they reflected the style of preaching of the church when Acts was written.⁵⁷ From the very earliest days of the church, then, the story was the sermon, and we are following good precedent if we use the story form in our preaching today.

The story form, then, can serve as a good model for our preaching. A preacher who is in touch with the people of the congregation and seeks to lead them along a journey in as creative a way as possible is allowing the story form to help the people hear the good news. That may help bring about what Edmund Steimle suggests is the purpose of preaching: "the sermon as word-deed brings our own story, our humanity in community, in touch with the Story."⁵⁸

⁵⁷"It is significant that the early Christian preaching was largely a story-telling mission, offering people a new story, the Christian kerygma, to reorient their sense of meaning both of historical time and of their own personal life-time." Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of American Academy of Religion, XXXIX (September 1971), 308, footnote.

⁵⁸Rice, p. 183.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

A WAY OF TELLING OUR OWN STORY

One way of helping people tell their own story is to have them draw up a "Life Line" which includes the major events of their lives, and also projects into the future. One suggested method is listed below.

1. On a fairly large sheet of paper (at least 8-1/2 x 14), draw a line from the left hand side of the paper (starting about two-thirds from the top) to the right hand side of the paper (ending about one-third from the top). This line represents the chronological years of your life. Write a zero at the left end and write the age you anticipate you will be when you die at the right end. (This latter date is, of course, speculation).

2. Put a mark on the line at your present age. If you estimate that you will die at age 70 and you are now 35, put the mark right in the middle; if you estimate that you will die at age 80 and you are now 60, put the mark three-fourths the way to the right.

3. Divide the line into some reasonable division representing your age at different points (perhaps every ten years or maybe eight or maybe fifteen, whatever seems to fit for you.) Do not try to put figures at every year.

4. Think back over your life and try to recall several high points and low points in your life. For example, graduation from high school may have been a high point, and your sophomore year in college a low point. Marriage may have been a high point and the birth of

children also high points. Perhaps the loss of a job or the death of a loved one or a divorce were low points.

5. Mark these high and low points on the chart, putting a mark on the paper for high points above the line and marks for low points below the line. The higher or lower the event in your life will determine how much above or below the line the mark should be placed.

6. Once you have several marks on the paper (with brief phrases to identify them), look to the future and anticipate any high or low points yet to come.

7. Draw a line through the high and low marks so that this new line looks something like a graph, with ups and downs. Begin at zero and continue the line to the projected date of your death.

8. When you have completed your Life Line, discuss it with one or two other individuals, and they will discuss theirs, too.

9. Additional lines can be added to this chart by marking, in the same way, religious high points and low points, and connecting the marks with a different colored pen/pencil. Also, a chart of your profession/job development can be added.

Thinking about the graph of your Life Line will put you in closer touch with the story of your life. And it may open areas that you have not thought about very much and would like to pursue.

The value of including the projected date of death is that it will help you consider the future and what changes you may want to make.

APPENDIX B

COMPARING OUR STORY WITH THE STORY

Among several methods of comparing a person's story with The Story of the Bible are relational Bible study and simulations. Both methods help people get involved in the story of the Bible in a personal way, thinking about how The Story relates to their own.

1. A Relational Bible Study

In a three-hour study program for Advent, two relational Bible studies were used. In the first, the people were asked to read Isaiah 9:2-7 carefully, and then to answer the following questions:

- a. What had been the situation of the people to whom this passage was written?
 - 1) They had been very happy.
 - 2) Things were pretty bleak and grim.
 - 3) They were very busy.
 - 4) They did not want any change to take place.
- b. Something good has occurred among these people. How did they feel about this good news?
 - 1) It was as if a great light shined upon them.
 - 2) They were as happy as they usually were after a full harvest had been brought in.
 - 3) They felt the way they did when they passed out the loot after winning a war.
 - 4) All of the above.
- c. The good news these people received came with the birth of a baby boy, who would become a king. What would happen under his rule?
 - 1) There would be peace.
 - 2) He would establish justice.
 - 3) His period of rule would never end.
 - 4) All of the above.

- d. As Christians have read this passage, they assumed that Isaiah was prophesying the coming of:
 - 1) John the Baptist.
 - 2) The Apostle Paul.
 - 3) King David.
 - 4) The Messiah (or Christ).

- e. In some ways, we live in "a land of deep darkness." List at least five things that illustrate how this is true for our land today.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)

- f. Imagine for a moment that you are the Messiah (the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace")! What five things would you do so that "a great light" would shine in our land.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)

- g. In your answer to question "f" above, what would be the two most important things you would do?
 - 1)
 - 2)

After the participants had time to answer these questions on their own, they were asked to share their responses in a small group and later in the larger group (if not over fifteen).

In the second Bible study (with other activities intervening), the passage under consideration was Luke 1:46-38. After reading the Scripture lesson the people were asked to respond to the following questions (and to discuss them as before).

- a. When the angel spoke to Mary, what was her first reaction?

- 1) She was thrilled.
 - 2) She thought Gabriel was handsome.
 - 3) She was quite pleased.
 - 4) She was greatly troubled.
- b. Who were two of Mary's future son's ancestors?
- 1) David
 - 2) Jacob
 - 3) Amos
 - 4) Other _____
- c. When Mary had sized up the situation, how did she respond to the angel?
- 1) "I guess I'll go through it if I have to."
 - 2) "Who, me?"
 - 3) "I'd rather not get involved."
 - 4) "If this is what God wants, I am willing."
 - 5) "Why not give Elizabeth twins instead."
- d. Suppose you were a twenty year old girl engaged to a fine young man, and an angel said that you were pregnant. What would go through your mind?
- 1) "What will Joseph think?"
 - 2) "What will I tell mom and dad?"
 - 3) "How can this be?"
 - 4) All of the above.
 - 5) Other _____
- e. List at least three things that have been thrust upon your life you did not particularly want.
- ____ 1)
 - ____ 2)
 - ____ 3)
 - ____ 4)
 - ____ 5)
- f. In your answer to question "e" above, put a "Y" (yes) or an "N" (no) in front of each answer to indicate your response. (Yes, I accepted this willingly; No, I did not accept it willingly.)

2. A Biblical Simulation

"The Shepherd Game" is part of the Advent program from which the previous Bible studies were taken. The purpose of The Shepherd

Game is to provide people with a simulated experience of that which confronted the shepherds who were out in the fields the night of the first Christmas. The game is not too heavy, but more fun and enjoyable.

SETTING: It is designed to play in a church building where various groups of 3-6 "shepherds" may move separately through the building. You will adapt the game to fit your building.

AN OVERVIEW: After brief preliminary instructions, each group of 3-6 shepherds is given a series of seven envelopes, confronting them with various decisions. First they decide whether they believed that the voice they just heard was really an angel. Then they must decide what to do about their sheep. After choosing a gift to present to the newborn king, they enter Bethlehem to knock on the door of a home as they try to find where the manger is located. The homeowner is very upset with them for disturbing his sleep, so they must find which Inn (there are several doors marked "Inn") is the correct one. After finding the Inn, they are directed to the manger where they bow down and worship the Savior.

PREPARATION:

1. The contents of the envelopes should be cut apart and put into separate numbered envelopes, a set of seven for each group of shepherds. Envelopes #4, 5 and 7 have a space to write in the correct place for the "Home." (See below).

2. Record on a tape recorder a firm, dignified voice reading Luke 2:10b-12, followed by several voices reading Luke 2:14 in unison.

3. Envelope #4 tells the shepherds to knock on the door of a home in Bethlehem. Choose one door for each group of shepherds, and write that location on the sheet in their envelope #4 (such as "Boiler Room," "Pantry off Kitchen," etc.) Preferably these doors should be on a floor or in an area away from the meeting room. They should be as far from each other as possible, too. On these doors put a sign which says: "In lieu of knocking, press PLAY button on the tape recorder." Have a recorder near by with the following message (in an angry voice): "Who's there? And what in the heck do you want at this time of night? (Pause 5-8 seconds). What? Are you nuts or something? Who in the world do you think you are, seeking a new-born king in the middle of the night? There's no new-born king. Herod is king, and his wife will never have another child. New, get out of here before I call the Praetorian Guard. . . ." (Another voice concludes, softly: "Press OFF button and open envelope #5"). (If tape recorders are not available, this information could be printed in an additional envelope).

4. Choose one room (an office or another room near the Sanctuary or Chapel) for the correct Inn. Put signs on many doors which say "Inn." In the correct Inn, have a person--the Leader, perhaps--stationed inconspicuously. When a group of shepherds knock on the door, say the following or its equivalent (do not read; make it a dialogue, forcing them to answer you): "Good evening. May I help you? (Pause for answer) . . . You're looking for a manger that holds a newborn baby? Yes, we had a young couple come by here tonight. They're out in the stable. You may go see then, if you like. Go through the door just South of you that says "Employees Only." Then

turn right twice. There you will find the manger with the new-born baby. Be quiet so as not to wake the baby. And when you find the manger, open envelope #7."

You should be sure to re-arrange these directions to fit your church and situation.

5. If the Chancel area of the Sanctuary or Chapel is available, have a doll in a manger near the Altar or Communion Table. Tape soft Christmas music, keep lights low, make the setting as worshipful as possible. Or you could even have a live couple with a baby.

PLAYING THE GAME:

1. Read together Luke 2:8-20.

2. Give these instructions: "You are divided into groups, with each group being the shepherds who heard the message from the angels. I will give you a set of seven envelopes, each containing a paper explaining a decision you must make. This is not a race. The aim is not to be the first team finished, but to help you experience what happened to the shepherds on that first Christmas Eve long ago. Any questions?" . . . Do not offer additional information, and answer the questions as briefly as possible. . . . Inconspicuously turn on hidden tape recorder with the angel's voice from Luke 2. When the passage is over, tell them to open envelope #1.

3. De-briefing. When everyone has returned, talk about the game, especially how the participants felt. Relate this to the experience of the first shepherds and to our experience as Christians today. For example, the shepherds had to decide that they were really

hearing angels, and so do we have to make a decision about what we believe.

CONTENTS OF ENVELOPES:

ENVELOPE #1.

"Good day, my shepherd friends. You just heard a voice saying, 'Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.'

Your first decision is this: do you believe that was the voice of an angel? . . . You have three minutes to make your decision. If you decide yes, then you may open envelope #2. If you decide no, then you may sit here and tend your sheep and wait for the others to return to tell you if they found a new born savior. A majority vote rules. Or you may operate on a consensus basis.

ENVELOPE #2.

"Greetings, again, my believing shepherd friends. You have been told by the angel that you will find the babe 'in the city of David' (that's Bethlehem, if you did not know it) wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

If you choose to go and find the new born child, you must first decide what to do about your sheep. If you decide that one will stay and watch over them you must decide who that will be. Again, decide by vote or consensus. Take five minutes for your decision.

You may open envelope #3 when the time has elapsed and you have made your decision.

ENVELOPE #3

Now you are almost ready for your journey. But one last detail. If you find the babe, what gift will you present to him? You must come up with some gift from your group for the new-born savior.

When your gift has been chosen, open envelope #4. I hope that you have been generous and that your gift is a worthy one.

ENVELOPE #4

We're off! But one problem. It's the middle of the night, and the angel did not tell you where the manger is located. When you enter Bethlehem, knock on the door of someone's home and ask: "Can you help us find the new born King?" The right door for you to knock on is: _____.

ENVELOPE #5

Wow! What a hardnose he was. Scrooge himself! Perhaps, however, he was right. Perhaps there is no new-born king. In some ways I don't blame him for thinking we're a bunch of kooks, knocking on his door in the middle of the night. Perhaps the voice you heard in the fields wasn't a real angel, but only your imagination, or a hidden tape recorder.

What do you think? Was this man correct? Or was that really an angel telling you the truth? You must decide whether to continue your search or not. If you decide you will continue, open envelope #6. If you decide to the contrary, return to the _____ (where there may be coffee and donuts available on a first-come first-serve basis).

ENVELOPE #6

What a time of night to be searching for a manger. The next step is to find an Inn and see if there is an innkeeper still awake who can help you to your destination, the manger that holds the new-born savior.

There are several Inns in Bethlehem, all represented by doors with the word "Inn" on them. Go find an Inn and knock on the door. If no one answers, the Innkeeper must be asleep. Find another Inn and knock again. I am sure there is at least one Inn still open tonight.

ENVELOPE #7

You have found the manger and the Savior. Place your gift on the floor beside the manger, and fall down upon your knees and offer up your own silent prayers to God. After a few moments return quietly to the _____.

APPENDIX C

STORIES AND CHILDREN

1. The Wilderness Simulation.

Leading children in a reenactment of a Scripture story is a good way to help them know it. They get a better feeling for the story when they are involved with it. Simulations can be complex and involved, or they can be relatively simple.

The following Bible simulation was used in a confirmation class to help participants learn the story of Moses leading the people through the wilderness. It was carried out completely on our church property, but a park might be more appropriate where the church does not have much grounds. Preparations were necessary, of course, to see that the required items were ready as needed. It helps a lot to show a film-strip or tell the story of Moses ahead of time.

As the simulation begins, the leader tells the class that they are the people of Israel and are slaves in Egypt. Find some limbs or cement blocks that need moving, and have the participants carry them back and forth while the leader talks about what it was like to be in slavery. A sign saying "Egypt" could identify the location.

Then wander over to a pre-arranged place that can represent the Nile River (we happened to have an irrigation ditch which serves admirably; a sidewalk with a "Nile" sign would work as well). Talk about the birth of Moses, and then "find" a doll in the Nile. Discuss his growing up in Pharaoh's household, and ask if they remember what

happened when he was a young man. Talk about his killing the Egyptian and having to flee, then head over to another place where there is a sign saying "Midian." Ask what his occupation was in Midian, and have some of the children be sheep. The leader can take the role of Moses or have an older youth do it (pre-instructed, with words on a 3 x 5 card). Have another sign which says "burning bush," and when Moses and the sheep come by this, turn on a cassette recorder which has on it the following script, with silent spaces for Moses to respond.

God (on tape): "Moses, Moses!!!"

Moses (live): "Here am I."

God: "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people."

Moses: "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, 'What is his name' what shall I say to them?'"

God: "I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel. 'I am has sent me to you.' This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

Moses should take off his shoes and bow down during this dialogue. When it is over, talk about how Moses felt, and then return to Egypt. Moses goes to Pharaoh (pre-instructed, with words on a 3 x 5 card) and they have the following dialogue.

Moses: "Let my people go."

Pharaoh: "Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go?"

Moses: "Let us go worship God for three days."

Pharaoh: "Why do you take the people away from their work? Give them more work to do!"

Explain that the people were given more work to do, and then

lead them in shouting (with feeling) to Moses: "You dummy, you dummy, you dummy!"

Talk about the plagues, and have the youth participate by saying together, and loudly, the following phrases for each plague (each three times).

- 1) "See the blood."
- 2) "Here come the frogs."
- 3) "Watch out for those gnats."
- 4) "We'll get you with flies."
- 5) "Kill the cattle."
- 6) "Boils, boils, boils."
- 7) "Heavy hail will fall."
- 8) "Grasshoppers all over me."
- 9) "A dust storm."
- 10) "First born shall die!"

Then Pharaoh responds: "Get out of here!" The people drop everything and leave, running to the next location, the Red Sea. (We used another section of the irrigation ditch, which was ideal, but anything designated "Red Sea" could work. A creek in a park would be excellent, a sidewalk or puddle would be adequate). Talk about the people camping by the Red Sea, and then seeing Pharaoh's soldiers coming after them. Have the person who played Pharaoh come toward them with (or on) a small hobby horse or trike. The people cross over the "Red Sea" while Pharaoh gets stuck.

Now move to the place marked "Marah," and talk about their thirst. Have two pitchers of water ready, with cups. Instruct them that you will take a break for a drink, and suggest they wait to drink until all have a cup of water. Fill small cups about one-half full from one pitcher, which has some vinegar added to the water. Have them drink at the same time, and watch out for the reaction! Then take a

little piece of wood and toss it in the pitcher and pour them good ice water from the other pitcher. Discuss the bitter water and how the people felt towards Moses.

For manna, have a small container of salty crackers hidden somewhere, and "discover" them and talk about manna. Then locate your Mount Sinai, where Moses finds a plaque of wood with the Ten Commandments (take a piece of wood about 4" x 10" and stick on ten address labels with the Ten Commandments typed on them).

The people spent forty years in the wilderness. You can have little signs marked "5 years," "10 years," etc., in a row, to signify the 40 years. Then head back to the classroom which becomes the Promised Land.

This simulation is very simple, though it takes some preparation. One of the highlights is the vinegar water. That makes an impression! There are many possible ways of refining and developing the simulation, limited only by the time and imagination of the leader.

2. The Bible Story Game.

This game was developed for one purpose: to help children learn the major events of the Bible in their correct chronological sequence so that they will better understand The Story of the Bible. The idea that opened the way for The Bible Story Game came from familiarity with one of the most popular board games of all time, Monopoly. Children and adults who play Monopoly know the names of all the spaces on the board by heart, without trying. Why not have a game with events of the Bible on the board? Monopoly is challenging and fun, so a game

with Bible events must have these characteristics, too, in order to be successful.

The Bible Story Game developed from these initial thoughts. Thirty-six biblical events were chosen and placed in order on a board in the shape of a cross (see page 90; the actual playing board was 22" by 28"). The thirty-six Experiences (as they are called) were divided into twelve sets of three and color-coded. The various Experiences within a set are similar events. On the Scoresheet the Experiences are listed by sets (see page 91). Some Experiences may seem "forced" into their set, for any structural groupings suggest repeated themes in the Bible. One set is the Liberation Set, which includes the Hebrews in Egypt, the Exodus, and the Resurrection. These Experiences are placed on the board, which includes the Hebrews in Egypt and the Crucifixion.

The goal of The Bible Story Game is to acquire all thirty-six Experiences, either by landing on that Experience or by drawing an Experience Card. Here are the rules:

1. Deal five Experience Cards to each player. Mark on Scoresheet at player's first turn.
2. Shake dice. Highest number goes first, move to left.
3. Start at Creation, throw dice, move down as indicated.
4. As player lands on Experience space, mark Scoresheet with scoring pen.
5. Special Spaces:
 - a) Creation. Draw one Experience Card every time player passes Creation.

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4. As player lands on Experience space, mark Scoresheet with scoring pen.
5. Special Spaces:
 - a) Creation. Draw one Experience Card every time player passes Creation.

- b) Exodus, Return to Jerusalem, Resurrection. This is the Liberation Set. Draw one Experience Card every time player lands on one of these spaces.
 - c) Creation, Exodus, Eighth Century Prophets, and Jesus Christ. Draw two Experience Cards every time player lands on one of these spaces.
 - d) "God Speaks." Draw blue card every time player lands on one of these spaces.
 - e) Hebrews in Slavery, Exile, Crucifixion. This is the Bondage Set. Penalty. Player must throw doubles (three tries each turn) or turn in Liberation Card to leave these spaces. Penalty delays player two turns only.
6. Draw one Experience Card when player completes any three-card Experience Set.
 7. Draw three Experience Cards when player completes Liberation Set H.
 8. When player shakes doubles, go again. Three doubles in a row sends player to Exile.
 9. Save extra Experience Cards if Set not complete. When matched with Wild Card, player may choose any other Experience of same set.

The Experience Cards allow players to gain Experiences without landing on them. There are seventy-two Experience Cards as follows:

1. Thirty-six cards, one each for every Experience.
2. Twelve cards, one each for each set.
3. Six "Free Experience" cards, which allow player to choose any Experience.
4. Ten "Two Cards," which, when player accumulates two of them, allows choice of any Experience.
5. Eight "Wild Cards," which, when matched with an extra Experience Card (when player draws a card of an Experience he/she has already acquired), allows player to choose one Experience from same set as the extra card.

The "God Speaks" Cards are drawn whenever a player lands on one of the four "God Speaks" spaces. There are twenty-four "God Speaks" Cards, as follows:

1. Four "lose One Turn" cards.
2. Two cards which say: "Throw a one or six on either die next turn or lose that turn."
3. Four "Draw One Experience Card" cards.
4. Two "Draw Three Experience Cards" cards.
5. Two cards which say "Move forward two spaces, check that Experience if you need it, then take extra card."
6. Two cards which say "Move forward four spaces, check that Experience if you need it, then take extra turn."
7. Two "Take Two More Turns" cards.
8. Six "Liberation Cards," which can be held to get player out of Hebrews in Slavery, Exile, or Crucifixion.

In the play of the game, players save up Free Experience Cards and Two Cards until near the end when they use them to acquire the Experiences they still need. It is best to play with three or four people. If there are six or more, it moves a little slowly.

And the game works! Children enjoy it, and "painlessly" learn the order of the major biblical events. This provides a good foundation for church school teaching about the varied stories. And children ask questions about some of the Experiences. For example, "What is manna?" and "Why is the Eighth Century Prophets space before the Seventh Century Prophets space?" It is important not to get too "teachy," insisting that the players read the statement on the Scoresheet each time. If the leader will let the children enjoy the game and have fun with it, it does a more effective job of teaching. (When first hearing about "The Bible Story Game," my children, ages 12, 9, 7, groaned because it was about the Bible. The next morning, after having played it once, the two youngest were playing it before anyone else was up instead

of watching Saturday morning cartoons.) However, there is good teaching material available when the children are familiar with the game.

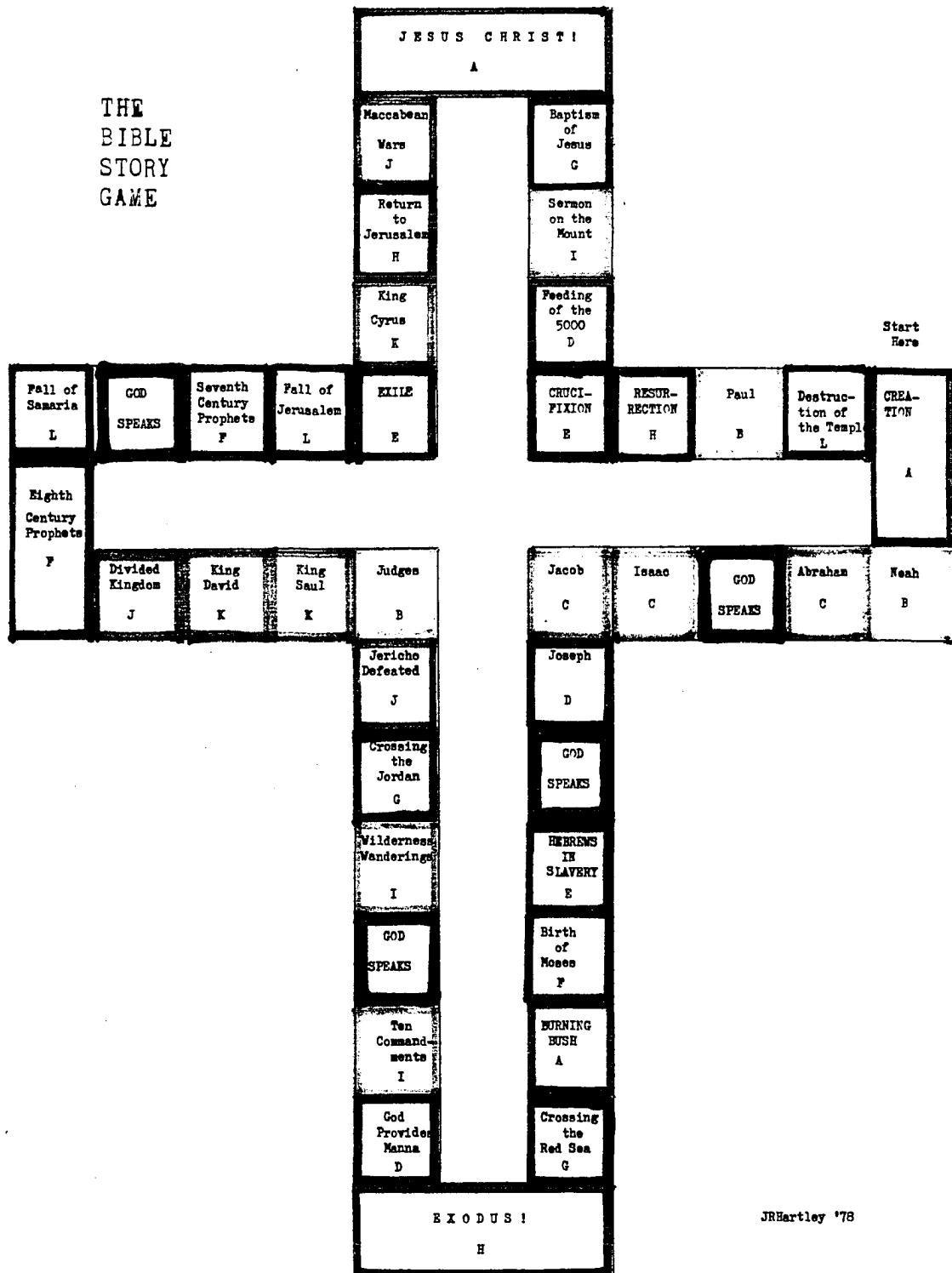
A Leader might ask, for example, how the three Experiences in the Feeding Set, D, are related, etc.

PLEASE NOTE:

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and indistinct. Filmed in the
best possible way.

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS.

THE
BIBLE
STORY
GAME



JRHartley '78

THE BIBLE STORY GAME SCORESHEET

NAME _____

Use Pen to Mark Scoresheet as you Experience the various events.

ACTS OF GOD SET A.	CREATION Genesis tells us that God created the world and provided for everything in it. Set A.	THE BURNING BUSH Moses heard God speak to him in the bush that burned but was not consumed. Set A.	JESUS CHRIST IS BORN! God acted again in Jesus Christ to bring hope and salvation to the people. Set A.
LEADERS SET B.	NOAH Noah trusted God and took his family and many creatures on the ark. Set B.	THE JUDGES RULED Several Judges received the spirit of God and proved to be superb leaders. Set B.	APOSTLE PAUL The Apostle Paul took the good news of God's love to many people. Set B.
PATRIARCHS SET C.	ABRAHAM Abraham followed God's call and left Haran for Palestine. Set C.	ISAAC Isaac was a faithful son. Set C.	JACOB Jacob wrestled with God and was re-named Israel. Set C.
FEEDING SET D.	JOSEPH Joseph helped Egypt survive the famine and provided grain for his brothers. Set D.	GOD PROVIDES MANNA God provided manna daily to feed the people while they were in the wilderness. Set D.	FEEDING OF THE 5000 Jesus fed the 5000 to demonstrate God's love for the people. Set D.
BONDAGE SET E.	HEBREWS IN SLAVERY The Hebrew people were held in slavery by Pharaoh's men. Set E.	EXILE The people in Exile in Babylon tried to remember God's love for them. Set E.	THE CRUCIFIXION The evil side of human-kind could not accept God's love, and crucified the Son. Set E.
PROPHETS SET F.	BIRTH OF MOSES Moses was born a Hebrew but raised by Pharaoh's daughter. Set F.	EIGHTH CENTURY PROPHETS Amos and Hosea were among the eighth century prophets who called the people to follow God. Set F.	SEVENTH CENTURY PROPHETS Isaiah and Jeremiah urged the kings to trust in God and not in military power. Set F.
THROUGH-THE-WATERS SET G.	CROSSING THE RED SEA God led the people through the waters of the Red Sea to safety. Set G.	CROSSING THE JORDAN Joshua led the people through the waters of the Jordan into the Promised Land. Set G.	BAPTISM OF JESUS Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River to affirm his identity with the people. Set G.
LIBERATION SET H.	THE EXODUS! God delivered his people from bondage in Egypt! Set H.	RETURN TO JERUSALEM! The people returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and their faith. Set H.	THE RESURRECTION! God's love was more powerful than evil and would not be defeated! Set H.
LEARNING SET I.	TEN COMMANDMENTS God gave the Ten Commandments to show the people how to respond to his love. Set I.	WILDERNESS WANDERINGS While they were in the wilderness God taught the people to depend on Him. Set I.	SERMON ON THE MOUNT Jesus taught the people the truth about God's love for them. Set I.
FIGHTING SET J.	JERICHO DEFEATED Joshua led the people in the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down. Set J.	THE DIVIDED KINGDOM When Solomon died, civil war broke out between Israel and Judah. Set J.	MACCABEAN WARS The Jewish people fought valiantly to overthrow foreign rulers. Set J.
KING SET K.	KING SAUL Saul was the first king of the Israelite people. Set K.	KING DAVID RULES The great King David ruled over the middle east with wisdom and power. Set K.	KING CYRUS RULES King Cyrus of Persia allowed captives to return home to Jerusalem. Set K.
DESTRUCTION SET L.	FALL OF SAMARIA The mighty Assyrians destroyed Samaria and the northern kingdom, Israel. Set L.	FALL OF JERUSALEM The Babylonians overran Judah and carried the people of Jerusalem into Exile. Set L.	DESTRUCTION OF TEMPLE The Roman soldiers destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A. D. Set L.